



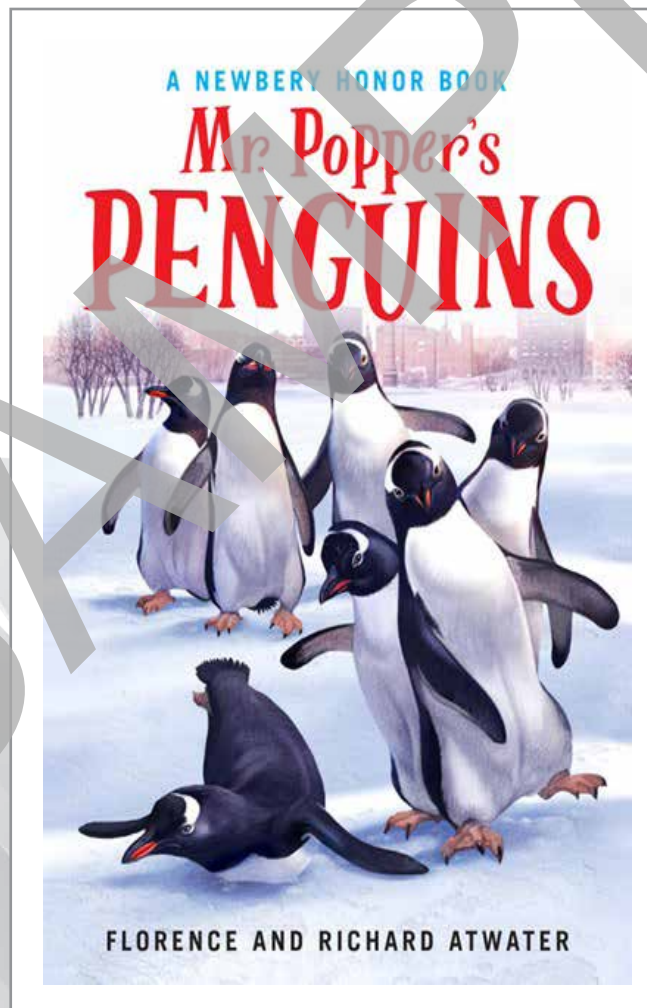
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 3-5**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Mr. Popper's Penguins

Richard Atwater



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

# Mr. Popper's Penguins

Richard Atwater

## 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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## Table of Contents

Summary.....	3
About the Author.....	3
Introductory Activities and Information .....	3
Twenty Chapters.....	16
Chapters contain: Chapter Summary, Vocabulary Words, Discussion Questions and Activities, Supplementary Activities	
Postreading Questions .....	40
Postreading Extension Activities .....	41
Bibliography .....	43
Assessment.....	44

## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, visualizing,  
evaluating, analyzing details

### Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,  
cause/effect, inference,  
comparison/contrast

### Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion,  
reader's theater, drama

### Writing

Description, narrative, poetry,  
journal, letter, news story

### Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot  
development, story map,  
conflict, theme

### Vocabulary

Synonyms, antonyms, words  
in context

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## Summary of *Mr. Popper's Penguins*

Mr. Popper is a house painter with an unusual winter hobby. He reads books on polar expeditions and writes letters to explorers. He writes to Admiral Drake, who sends him an Antarctic penguin whom he names Captain Cook. The penguin becomes ill and droops. After the veterinarian cannot cure Captain Cook, Mr. Popper asks the aquarium for help. They send another penguin named Greta, and soon there are ten more little penguins. Penguins eat a great many fish, and Mr. Popper does not have enough money to feed his family and the penguins. After creating a highly successful music hall act, Mr. Popper is finally able to achieve his dream of polar exploration.

## About the Author

Richard Atwater taught at the University of Chicago and wrote a humorous newspaper column in verse. He married Florence H. Carroll and had two daughters. Mr. Atwater began writing *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, but when he became ill, Florence Atwater completed writing the book.

## Introductory Activities and Information

### **Note:**

*It is not intended that everything presented in this guide be done. Please be selective and use discretion when choosing the activities you will do with the unit. The choices that are made should be appropriate for your use and your group of students. A wide range of activities has been provided so that individuals as well as groups may benefit.*

1. Display a large globe and a flat surface map of the world. The teacher will ask the students to locate the North and South Poles and Antarctica. (See the map on the next page of this guide.)

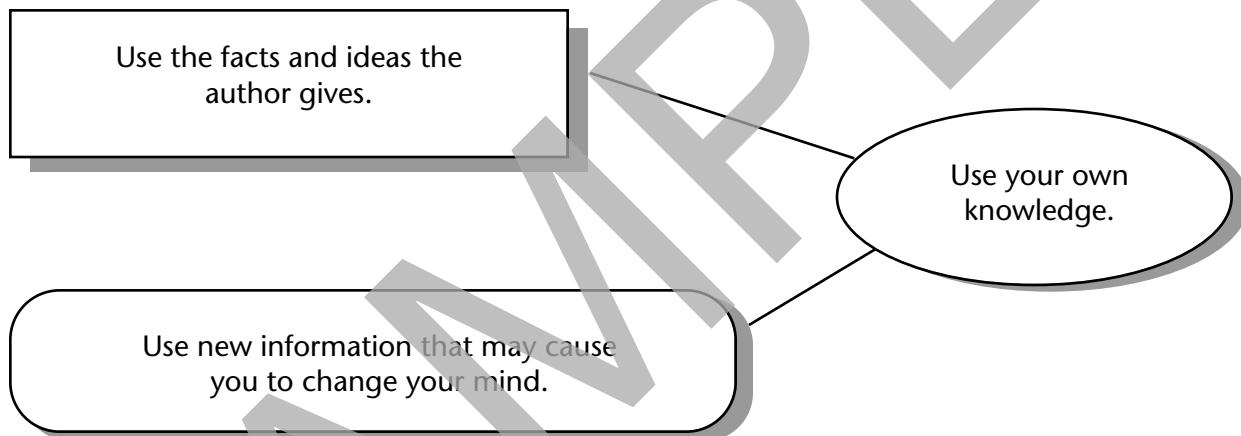
Not all penguins live in polar regions. They make their homes in cool waters, but no penguins go north of the equator. Cool waters exist close to the equator in the South Pacific Ocean, and penguins are found there also. Additional activities related to the map will be included in the unit.

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## Using Predictions in the Novel Unit Approach

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how the conflict will be resolved, which details given by the author will be important to the plot, which details will help to fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses. As students work on predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader’s thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give us to help us in making our predictions? Why are some predictions more likely than others?

A predicting chart is for students to record their predictions. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, you can review and correct previous predictions. This procedure serves to focus on predictions and to review the stories.



Predictions:

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## Chapter-by-Chapter Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Activities

### Chapter I

### “Stillwater”—Pages 3-8

#### Chapter Summary

Mr. Popper returns home from a day’s job of painting. Mrs. Popper is worrying about not having enough money for the winter when there is not much work for Mr. Popper.

#### Vocabulary

calimine 3	untidy 3	absent-minded 5	expeditions 6
authority on the subject 6		bungalow 7	litter 8

#### Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Why is the chapter titled “Stillwater”? (*page 3, location of the story*)
2. Why do you think Mr. Popper is an unusual character? How does he differ from your father? What does your father do in his spare time? Why do you think Mr. Popper didn’t get a winter time job? (*Answers will vary.*)
3. What examples can you find to prove Mr. Popper was absent-minded? (*Page 5, He painted three sides of a kitchen green and the other side yellow. He dreamed about far-away countries.*)
4. Locate some of the countries and places Mr. Popper dreamed about: a) India; b) the Himalayas; c) the South Seas; and d) the North and South Poles. Mark these on your world map.
5. What strange places and adventures do you dream about? What are the chances that you will ever go to these countries or have such an adventure? In pairs during class, share your answers.
6. How does one become “an authority on the subject”? (*page 6*)
7. Why didn’t Mr. Popper work all year? (*Page 7, Most house painting and decorating in the colder parts of the United States is done in the spring and summer.*)
8. Why didn’t Mrs. Popper like Mr. Popper’s work? (*Page 8, It was “hard to sweep with a man sitting around reading all day,” and she worried about not having enough money for food.*) What solutions would you find for Mrs. Popper’s money problem? (*examples: second job for Mr. Popper or Mrs. Popper could work*)

#### Prediction

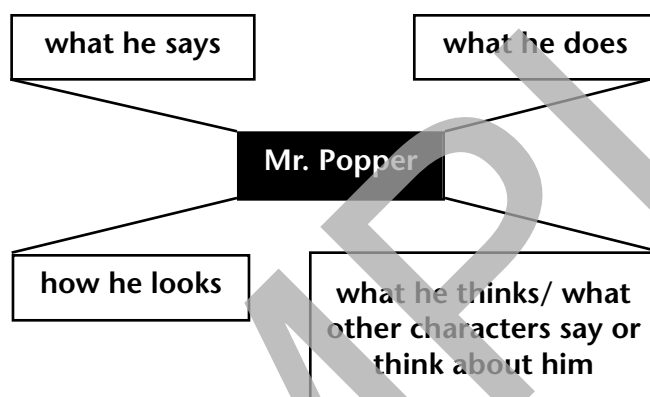
How do you think the Poppers will handle the money problem?

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### Literary Analysis: Characterization

Explain that characterization is the way an author informs readers about what characters are like. Direct characterization is when the author describes the character. Indirect characterization is when the reader figures out what the character is like based on what the character thinks, says, or does—or what other characters say about him or her.

Ask: “What are your impressions of Mr. Popper so far?” Ask students to support any words or phrases they use to describe him with evidence from the story. Have them jot down the evidence on a web like this one. For each of the major characters in this novel, make a character web.



### Literary Analysis: Humor

1. Can you list five things that kids think are funny but adults do not?
2. What are all the ways adults are funnier than kids?
3. Would you rather see something funny or hear something funny? Why?
4. Write your definition of humor.

### Supplementary Activities

#### 1. Story Map

Many stories have the same parts—a setting, a problem, a goal, and a series of events that lead to an ending or conclusion. These story elements can be placed on a story map. Just as a road map helps a driver get from one place to another, so, too, a story map leads a reader from one point to another. After reading the first chapter, what information do you have?

- What is the setting?
- Who is the main character?
- What is the problem? (This may change as the story progresses, so additional problems may be added.)

Begin the story map on page 12 of this guide.

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2. Begin the research project on Antarctica on page 19 of this guide. Use books on the library table and the Internet.

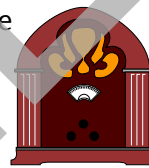
Answers for the research project: 1. ice 2. 5,400,000 square miles 3. South Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Widely Sea, Ross Sea, South Pacific Ocean 4. South America 5. Mt. Erebus 6. Roald Amundsen and Robert F. Scott and their crews 7. seals, whales, birds, krill and fish 8. thick layer of ice and snow

## Chapter II

## “The Voice in the Air”—Pages 9-14

### Chapter Summary

Mr. and Mrs. Popper discuss Antarctica. Mrs. Popper does not think she would like it at all, but Mr. Popper has written to the leader of an expedition to tell him how much he enjoyed the information about an earlier trip. Mr. Popper listens to a special broadcast from Antarctica, where Captain Drake says “Hello” to him and promises him a surprise.



### Vocabulary

spectacles 10

heathen 12

prospect 10

impressed 14

erect 11

tidy 12

### Discussion Questions and Activities

1. Before reading the chapter: Titles of books and chapters are very important. What do you think this chapter title means? (Predictions—List on the board before the chapter is read. Compare after reading.)
2. How did Mr. and Mrs. Popper’s views about the South Pole differ? (*Page 10, Mr. Popper never got tired of reading about the South Pole, but he thought that going there would be even better than just reading about it. Mrs. Popper thought that the South Pole sounded “very dull and cold, with all that ice and snow.”*) Do you think you would like to visit the South Pole? Would you think visiting the Moon or Mars would be more interesting?
3. How did Mr. and Mrs. Popper’s views about pets differ? (*Pages 11-12, Mr. Popper thought it would be fun to have a penguin for a pet. Mrs. Popper did not want any pets because pets make too much of a mess in the house and it costs money to feed a pet.*) How do your parents feel about pets?
4. What facts about penguins did Mr. Popper list? Are these facts true? (*Pages 11-12, Penguins do not fly like other birds. Penguins walk erect like men. They slide on their stomachs. They are very intelligent. Sea leopards eat penguins. All penguins live at the South Pole—not true.*)