

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Watership Down

by Richard Adams

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Watership Down

Notes

At first, students may resist the idea of reading a 500-page book about rabbits, but this story is worth the effort. Richard Adams' allegorical animal fantasy, written in 1972, is a fast-paced adventure story full of suspense and heart-warming characters. Students who overcome their initial reluctance will discover a fascinating culture and society made up of rabbits who are struggling to survive in a world where their natural habitat is steadily decreasing through the intrusion of mankind. Adams creates a believable anthropomorphic society of rabbits complete with a rabbit language (Lapine) and a rabbit mythology. Many critics believe this story is also allegorical, so students should be encouraged to look for a deeper meaning when they read about the political and social differences between the warrens.

All references come from the Avon Books edition of *Watership Down*, copyright 1972.

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Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. define vocabulary words from the text, including Lapine vocabulary words.
2. define and cite examples of the following literary terms in the story: allegory, allusion, foreshadowing, theme, pun, metaphor, simile, anthropomorphism, irony, verisimilitude.
3. point out examples of Lapine proverbs in the story and discuss what these proverbs reveal to the reader about the culture.
4. discuss the systems of government for the different rabbit warrens in the story; comment on the extent these governments are allegorical representations of human governments.
5. discuss the following themes from *Watership Down* concerning relationships of both man and rabbit with nature:
 - Man, like other animals, has natural instincts that should be recognized and developed.
 - Man needs to remain close to nature so as not to does not lose all natural instincts and abilities.
 - Nature must be appreciated and preserved for the benefit of all creatures.
 - Mankind must not destroy nature because to do so is evil and against the will of God.
 - Animals must adapt to survive.
6. compare Hazel's leadership abilities with the other Chief Rabbits in the story and cite incidents from the text illustrating that Hazel is a good leader.
7. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following theme: A good leader develops friendly relationships with his or her neighbors.
8. point out why Pimperial's death is ironic.
9. discuss the basics of Lapine religious beliefs, including beliefs on the following topics: creation, death, after life, God, providence.
10. point out instances of humor in the story.
11. discuss the significance of chapter titles.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Define each of the following Lapine vocabulary words and explain why the word is important to the plot of the story:
 - Flayrah,
 - Frith,
 - Hraka
 - Hrududu
 - Ni-Frith
 - Owsla
 - Silflay
 - Tharn
2. Some critics believe that Fiver's visions serve as foreshadowing in the story. Find an example of one of Fiver's visions and discuss how it foreshadows a future event in the story.
3. Cite three incidents from the story illustrating the idea that mankind is destroying nature. Cite two incidents from the story illustrating that sometimes man tries to help the animals. Why do you think Adams includes these compassionate incidents in a novel whose overall themes concern man's destruction of nature?
4. Some critics believe that General Woundwort brings about his own downfall because of his flawed character. State whether or not you agree with this idea. Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.
5. List seven qualities of good leadership that you see in Hazel in order of importance with the quality you believe to be the most important at the top.
6. Cite incidents from the story to prove the following statement: A good leader develops friendly relationships with his or her neighbors.
7. Who is the Black Rabbit? Why do you think Bigwig insists on hearing the story of the Black Rabbit before the raid on Efrafa?
8. Why do you suppose there are so few female characters in the story? If you could talk to the author, what might you say to him on this topic?

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PART I – The Journey

Chapter 1 – The Notice Board

VOCABULARY

creosote – a black oily liquid used as a wood preservative

culvert – a drain that passes under a road

warren – a rabbit's den

1. Define the following Lapine terms:

outskirters

Owsla

2. Fiver and Hazel are brothers, but they are very different. Describe each rabbit and the ways they are different.

3. Where is Fiver when he first alerts Hazel to the impending danger? Who or what do you think is the source of this danger?

Chapter 11 – Hard Going

1. An allegory is defined as a story that represents abstract ideas or moral qualities and has both a literal level and a symbolic level of meaning. Many critics believe this novel is an allegory discussing concepts such as morality, justice, honor, and family. In this chapter, the smaller rabbits want to know who is the Chief Rabbit. The author is identifying characteristics he believes are important in a leader. Compare Hazel and Bigwig and determine which rabbit, in your opinion, would make the best Chief Rabbit. Cite incidents from the story to support your selection.

2. For what reason does Blackberry declare that Hazel is the Chief Rabbit?

Chapter 20 – A Honeycomb and a Mouse

Vocabulary

colonnade – a series of columns

oblique – slanted

stupefied – stunned

1. Find an example of rabbit humor in this chapter.

2. Why do Hazel and the others refer to the new great burrow as the Honeycomb?

3. Why do you suppose Hazel decides to help the mouse escape the attacking bird?

Chapter 35 – Groping

VOCABULARY

apathetic – not interested; indifferent; listless

torpid – slow and dull

1. How do the guards prevent the rabbits from running away?

2. Why is Blackavar standing outside the warren, but not feeding? How does Bigwig feel about Blackavar?

3. Why does Bigwig decide to talk to Hyzenthlay about the plan to steal does from the warren?

4. In what way are Hyzenthlay and Fiver similar?

5. Whom do Hyzenthlay and Bigwig tell about the plan to escape from the warren?
