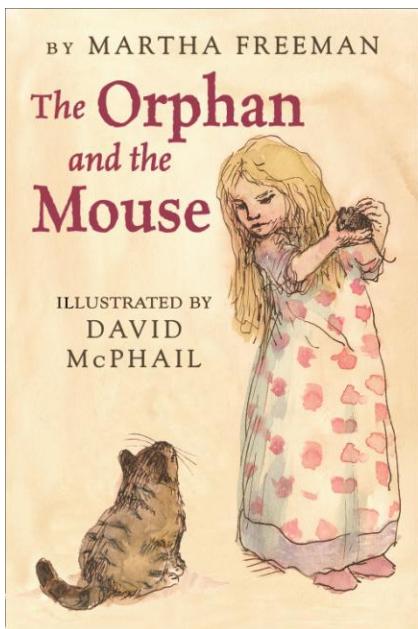


CCSS Adaptability Note

The activities suggested within this Educator's Guide can easily be adapted to conform to the listed Standards in the entire grade range.



HC: 978-0-8234-3167-0 / PB: -3451-0
E-book available

THE ORPHAN AND THE MOUSE

by Martha Freeman

"An original, rousing mouse adventure in the tradition of *Stuart Little*."—*Kirkus Reviews*

About the Book

GRADES
3–7

In this sweet and suspenseful tale, an orphan and a mouse discover that their unusual friendship becomes absolutely vital to holding on to the lives they know.

Can a mouse and an eleven-year-old girl be friends? When Mary, a mouse whose job it is to steal useful human items, and Caro, a lonely orphan, meet, it isn't under the best of circumstances. Yet the two bond immediately and soon embark on a page-turning adventure to make the orphanage safe for both the babies and mice of generations to come.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Literature/Language Arts

Fiction vs. Nonfiction—Several of the important characters in this story are mice who talk, think, and act as people. Ask students to determine which of the actions portrayed in the story are things that real mice actually do and which are not. Help them to understand that this book is fiction, meaning an *imagined* story. Show them a few nonfiction books about mice and ask them to determine which of the characteristics and actions of *real* mice were accurately portrayed in this work of fiction. **CCSS RL.3–5.2; W.3–5.2**

Anthropomorphism—Alert students to the term *anthropomorphism*, a literary technique in which nonhuman entities (animals, toys, etc.) are given human characteristics in order to add interesting dimensions to a story. Call their attention to the book *Stuart Little* by E. B. White, which is mentioned several times in this story, and is

another excellent example of anthropomorphism. Ask them if they know any other books or stories that use this technique. They may want to read *Stuart Little* on their own, or perhaps the whole class can view the film.

Characterization—Discuss with students how an author goes about creating characters. What kinds of things do they need to include? Have each student choose one character from the book—either a human or a mouse—and write a profile of them, including (but not limited to) their age and appearance, what they wear, how they act, what's important to them, what they like to eat, their specific talents, and what they added to the total story. Students can write up their character profiles and create a portrait of their character to accompany it. **CCSS RL.3–5.3; W.4–5.9**

Vocabulary

There is rich vocabulary in *The Orphan and the Mouse*. Discuss the words with students to assure that they understand their use. Ask students to jot down other words that might be unfamiliar and, using clues from the context, try to define them. Some words include: insinuate (p. 1), epitome (p. 9), conundrum (p. 24), machinations (p. 32), unscrupulously (p. 61), dapper (p. 63), vanquished (p. 71), pompous (p. 107). Students can also look up these words in a dictionary and then tell or write their definitions in their own words, as well as their own sentences using the words. **CCSS RL.3-7.4; L.3-7.4**

Questions for Discussion

Students may discuss the following questions as a whole class, in partners, or small groups. Questions may also be used as writing prompts. **CCSS SL.3-5.1; W.3-5.1**

Heroes—Stuart Little (see above) is mentioned many times as a hero. What is a hero? What do heroes do? Ask students to determine who they think was the hero of this story and to present reasons to support their choices (which might vary). Ask students to name people whom they consider to be heroes—either well known, or community or family members, or friends—and to describe why they feel these people are heroes. **CCSS RL.3-5.4; W.3-5.1**

Art in Life—In the very beginning of the story it becomes evident that the mice value “pictures” which are actually postage stamps, and their search for these created some of the initial action of the story. Ask students to discuss the importance of art in their lives. What pictures do they have in their rooms or their homes? What pictures are visible in the classroom? What would our lives be like without these various examples of visual art? **CCSS RL.3-5.6; SL.3-5.4**

Power—Power is a recurring theme throughout all literature. In this story, Randolph has power over all of the mice, and Headmistress Mrs. George has power over the children at Cherry Street Children’s Home. Have students describe what it means to have power, what are the best ways to use power, and when having power over others is a good or a bad thing. Ask students to describe situations in their own lives where they felt powerless because of the actions of others who had power over them.

Family—When it becomes possible that Caro might be adopted, she begins thinking of her life at Cherry Street Children’s Home. She thinks, “They were her family now, or the closest thing she had to one.” (p. 151) Ask students to describe what the word “family” means to them. Are all families alike? What is their own family like? How is it the same or different from other families (real or in books)? What would the ideal family be like? Do they agree that the children at the home were a family? Why or why not? **CCSS RL.3-5.4**

Good vs. Evil—There are good and bad characters in the story. Ask students to list the major characters who are good and who are evil, then explain their reasoning using examples from the text. **CCSS RL.3-5.3**

Betrayal—When Caro is faced with the possibility that Mrs. George is up to no good, she finds it difficult to believe. Ask students to discuss how it feels when someone you have admired turns out to be a bad person. Perhaps they have examples from their own lives that they would feel comfortable mentioning. How do/did they deal with these situations?

Physical Differences—When Joanna Grahame, the movie star, reacts negatively to Caro’s deformed hand (p.51), it causes Caro to sob uncontrollably. Ask students to describe how this section of the story made them feel, and what they learned from it in relation to meeting people who are in some way different.

Communication—Caro and Mary Mouse seem to understand each other, even though they cannot actually talk together. At the end of the story, the narrative states, “Neither would ever understand the other. Each believed it was worthwhile to try” (p. 219). Ask students what these words mean to them, and then ask them to describe a situation they’ve perhaps experienced where they felt true communication was occurring . . . with another person, or even possibly with an animal. **CCSS RL.3-5.1; L.3.5; L.5.5**

Research / Electronic Resources

CCSS W.3–5.7, W.3–5.8

Stamps—Students may be interested in seeing the actual stamps mentioned in the story. They can access Google Images and search for: “Red River Oxcart Stamp”; “Louisa May Alcott Stamp”; and “We Can Do It Stamp.” They may also be interested in stamp collecting as a hobby. They can find a wealth of related information on this popular hobby here: <http://stamps.org/Young-Philatelists>

Historical Figures—Bess Truman and Bugsy Siegel were both mentioned in the story. Students are probably unfamiliar with these people, but they can find information here:

Bess Truman: www.trumanlibrary.org/bwt-bio.htm

Bugsy Siegel: www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lasvegas/peopleevents/p_siegel.html

The Lion and the Mouse—If students are unfamiliar with this well-known fable mentioned on p. 144, they can read it here: www.read.gov/aesop/007.html **CCSS RL.3.2**

Polio—In 1949 people throughout the United States were afraid to allow children to swim in public swimming pools (p. 39) due to the epidemic of this debilitating disease, which by now has been almost entirely eliminated in the U.S. thanks to Salk and Sabin vaccines. Today’s students are probably unaware of this disease and can find more information about it here: www.cdc.gov/features/poliofacts/ **CCSS RI.5.7**

Classroom Activities prepared by Sandy Schuckett, school library consultant.

About the Author



Martha Freeman is also the author of *Strudel's Forever Home*, the First Kids Mystery series and the Chickadee Court Mysteries. She has been a journalist, college instructor, and substitute teacher as well as an author. Her books for children and young adults include chapter books, mysteries, humor, and easy readers. A native of California, she now lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where *The Orphan and the Mouse* is set. Visit Martha's website at www.marthafreeman.com.