

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Poppy and Rye

by
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Book Information

Avi, Poppy and Rye
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Heartbroken over the death of her fiancé, Ragweed, Poppy journeys west to bring the sad news to Ragweed's family. But Poppy and her pal Ereth arrive only to discover the beavers have flooded the serene valley where Ragweed lived.

Award: Boston Globe/Horn Book Award/Honors; Misc./Other; State Award

Topics: Adventure, Rescue/Save; Adventure, Travel; Emotions, Love; Mysteries, Kidnappings; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Series, Poppy

Main Characters

Caster P. Canad an ambitious beaver who floods the Brook by building a dam

Clara Canad Caster Canad's daughter

Clover and Valerian the parents of Rye, Ragweed, and dozens of other mice

Ereth a grumbling porcupine who is Poppy's best friend; he is jealous of Ragweed and Rye

Poppy a female deer mouse on a quest to relay news about Ragweed's death to his parents, Clover and Valerian

Ragweed a golden mouse killed by an owl; he was in love with Poppy

Rye Ragweed's brother, who is torn over his feelings about Ragweed and his place in the family; he is in love with Poppy

Thistle and Curleydock Rye and Ragweed's brother and sister

Vocabulary

agitation the state of being disturbed, upset, or excited

forage to search for food and supplies

perpetually ceaselessly repeating or continuing without interruption

precariously dangerously lacking in stability

pungent having a sharp, bitter odor

raucous loud and harsh sounding

Synopsis

Clover and Valerian, parents of dozens of golden mice, are upset when they discover a beaver family, led by Mr. Caster P. Canad, has taken over the Brook and started building a dam. Even more upsetting is the realization they must move because their nest will be flooded when the dam is finished. Reluctantly, they pack up their home and find another place to live beneath a boulder on top of a nearby hill.

Meanwhile, Poppy, a deer mouse, leaves Dimwood Forest on her way to find Clover and Valerian in the Woodlands to tell them their eldest son, Ragweed, had been killed. She and Ragweed had been in love and were planning to marry. Now, however, Poppy wants to move on with her life and feels telling Ragweed's parents about his death will ease her grief. She is accompanied on her adventure by her best friend, Ereth, a grumpy porcupine who has secret feelings for Poppy and a deep jealousy of her previous relationship with Ragweed. At the same time, Rye, Ragweed's younger brother, sets out from his family's new home in the Woodlands in search of Ragweed, whose arrival is long overdue. Poppy and Rye meet when Rye spots Poppy dancing by herself in a meadow. The two mice share a dance and are quite taken with each other before Rye slips away. Rye, in fact, is so overwhelmed with emotion toward Poppy that he forgets about his search for Ragweed and returns home, not realizing that Poppy is on her way to find his family and deliver the sad news of Ragweed's fate.

Shortly after, Poppy meets Thistle, Ragweed's sister, who takes Poppy to see Clover and Valerian. Poppy is surprised to find Rye and to discover he is Ragweed's brother. When she shares the news of

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their son's death, the golden mice are devastated. Clover wants to know if Poppy was in love with Ragweed and, when she admits she was, Rye leaves the nest, envious of his brother and convinced he cannot win her love. He is confused and embarrassed by his feelings over the death of his brother. He thinks if he can find a way to stop the beavers from building the dam, he can redeem himself and become a hero in the eyes of Poppy and his family. But his plans fall short when he is captured and caged by Mr. Canad, who decides to hold Rye until the golden mice leave their new nest beneath the boulder. This will allow him to continue with his plans to expand the pond into a lake and build Canad's Cute Condos.

Poppy, not sure if Rye will return, takes a walk and encounters Mr. Canad, who informs her that the mice must move from their new home if they want to see Rye again. When she relays this message to Clover and Valerian, she is disappointed by their reaction to not challenge the beavers. She takes a raft to the beaver lodge, finds Rye in his cage, and explains to him that she never danced with Ragweed. She says this because she wants Rye to know that she has strong feelings for him. Knowing she cannot help Rye escape on her own, she leaves him to return back to the nest for help from his family. Again, she is disappointed by Clover and Valerian's reaction to her news. They are not willing to help rescue Rye, but Thistle and Curleydock, his siblings, volunteer to help. Together, the three set off and accidentally stumble across Ereth, who is tangled in vines. They free Ereth but he refuses to go with Poppy and runs off after she tells him she has fallen in love with Rye.

Poppy, Thistle, and Curleydock set out for the beaver lodge to rescue Rye. Mr. Canad's daughter, Clara, however, overturns their raft on the way and only Poppy is able to make her way into the lodge. She helps free Rye from his cage, but two beavers guarding the interior of the lodge prevent them from escaping. In the meantime, Valerian has decided that they must do something to stop the beavers. He and Clover gather their family to help release the boulder so it will roll down the hill and smash the

dam to bits. They work frantically to loosen the boulder, but Mr. Canad notices the mice are up to something and calls on his beaver clan to stop them at all costs. A battle follows between the mice and the beavers, but Ereth comes to the aid of the mice. The beavers retreat and the boulder hurtles down the hill, destroying the dam. Just as the dam is destroyed, Poppy and Rye make their escape from the lodge. They return to the golden mice family, marry, and set out to return to Dimwood Forest with Ereth.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why does Ereth have a difficult time expressing his love for Poppy? Why is it sometimes hard to share your feelings with others?

Ereth is afraid Poppy might not return the same feelings of love. She calls him her best friend, but he wants more than friendship; he would like to marry her. He is afraid to show his feelings toward her because he does not want to appear silly or foolish.

Literary Analysis

Rye is very confused about his feelings regarding his brother, Ragweed. What are some of the reasons for this conflict he feels? Have you ever been torn by your feelings for someone in your family?

Clover thinks Ragweed can do almost anything. She even believes that if he would return home, he could solve the problem with the beavers. He also was the eldest of the children and was often called upon to do important duties, so Ragweed overshadowed his younger brother, Rye. He often teased and lectured Rye, causing Rye to be resentful. Rye finds out that Poppy had loved Ragweed and feels there is no hope that Poppy could love him as well. Students may mention siblings or other relatives whom they love but with whom they have disagreements.

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Inferential Comprehension

Ragweed is described as having been blunt and cocky. Rye, on the other hand, is described as more thoughtful and somewhat of a dreamer. Which is probably the better mate for Poppy? Why?

Rye is probably the better suited mouse for Poppy because he and Poppy have more in common than Ragweed and Poppy. Both Rye and Poppy have a sensitive and romantic nature, which Ragweed did not have.

Constructing Meaning

Clover and Valerian are very reluctant to help Poppy rescue their son, Rye. Are they right not to want to risk the safety of the remainder of the family?

Some students may believe that Clover and Valerian should have taken more risks to free their son and that the family's safety was not as important as Rye's freedom. Other students, though, may feel that the safety of the majority is more important than the welfare of a single child.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Caster P. Canad and his beaver clan completely take over the Brook, forcing the golden mice to leave their nest. The beavers are damming up the Brook and Canad plans to turn the area into Canad's Cute Condos. Have students work in pairs to research beavers and their way of life. They should determine some of the following information: where beavers are commonly located, species information, average length, weight, and life span, why they build dams, how dams are useful to the surrounding area, etc. Once research is complete, have them make a chart or poster showing the information they discovered.

Understanding the Author's Craft The animals in *Poppy and Rye* are given human qualities. They talk, work, dance, and have human feelings. Take the class to the library to search for other books with animals who have human qualities. Check them out and bring them back to the

classroom. (You might also just have the librarian find these books ahead of time and have them in the room upon starting this activity.) Have the students read one of these books, and then have them write a short story using this type of extended personification.

Recognizing Feelings In chapter 25, Rye begins to recite a poem he wrote for Poppy. "Hail, sweet mouse of shape divine!..." Have students write a poem about someone or something they truly love, perhaps a relative, pet, or activity. You might also prefer to write one poem as a group about a character in the book.

Responding to Literature Poppy struggles to find a way to rescue Rye from his cage. She encounters vines that are too short, the beaver lodge vent hole covered up, and her fear of swimming. Despite those challenges, she continues on. In the end, Rye is rescued and they return home. Have students brainstorm a list of things they feel are challenging to them. Once a list is compiled, discuss why these things are challenging and what can be done to meet these challenges. For example, learning a certain athletic skill can prove to be challenging. Practice and determination can help meet the challenge.