

Poppy
by
Avi**Book Information**Avi, Poppy

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147 Pages

Book Level: 4.5

Interest Level: MG

A brave young mouse challenges the owl that rules over the territory and saves her family from starvation.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Boston Globe/Horn Book Award/Honors; State Award

Topics: Animals, Mice; Animals, Owls; Power Lessons AR, Grade 4; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Series, Poppy

Main Characters

Ereth a porcupine who helps Poppy on her mission

Lungwort Poppy's father and leader of a large family

Mr. Ocax an owl who rules the territory surrounding his tree

Poppy the principal character in the story; a young mouse who tries to find a new source of food and shelter for her family

Ragweed Poppy's boyfriend, who asks too many questions

Sweet Cicely Poppy's mother

Vocabulary

ignominiously humiliating or degrading

quill one of the hollow sharp spines of a porcupine or hedgehog

saunter to walk about in an idle or leisurely manner

snare drum a small double-headed drum with one or more wires or cords stretched across its lower head

talon the claw of an animal or, especially, a bird of prey

territory an area, often including a nesting or denning site and a variable foraging range, that is occupied and defended by an animal or group of animals

Synopsis

The story is set in and around Dimwood Forest. This is the area that Mr. Ocax, the mighty owl, considers to be his territory. He keeps watch over the animals, whom he calls his subjects. They must obey his rules.

A large family of mice also live in Mr. Ocax's territory and, for many years, have been obedient to him. Lungwort, the family leader, has taught the family to be fearful of the owl. He has shown them pictures of the animals from which the owl has "protected" them in return for their loyalty.

Ragweed and Poppy defy Mr. Ocax's rules by going out of the territory without his permission. They only want to dance in the moonlight, but Ragweed is killed for his defiance. Poppy escapes only to have her family punished for her act. The family is not allowed to move to an area with a better food supply.

Poppy believes Mr. Ocax does not want them to move to the new house for a reason, and she decides to go to the house to find the answer. The mouse becomes brave on her journey, and befriends a porcupine who helps her. Poppy discovers that Mr. Ocax will not let them go to the new house because he is afraid of a larger owl in the new territory.

Poppy realizes that the larger owl is a fake, and she uses the information to humiliate Mr. Ocax. He and Poppy fight a battle, which ends in Mr. Ocax's death after he smashes into a salt lick. Poppy saves her family by finding enough food to feed the large

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group.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why did Ereth help Poppy?

Answers may include: He wanted help getting salt from the farm, and he wanted to show Mr. Ocax that the owl was not as tough as he thought.

Literary Analysis

Why do you think Poppy should have become the new leader of the family?

Answers may include: She proved her courage; she stepped in and acted when her father could not function as the leader; she saved her family from starvation through her bravery and intelligence; she eliminated the family's main source of fear.

Inferential Comprehension

What would have happened if Mr. Ocax had lived after finding out the barn owl was fake?

Answers may include: He would have killed Poppy for humiliating him; he would have terrorized the rest of the family and eaten them before they starved; he would have moved to the barn himself after eating all of the mice by the orchard.

Constructing Meaning

Why do you think Lungwort remained as the leader of the family?

Answers may include: He was male and the eldest of the mice, and he had already proven himself and did not need to do so again.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story is set in The Dimwood Region, a territory under the control of Mr. Ocax. The mice living in the region were

expected to seek permission from Mr. Ocax if they wanted to go beyond a small area. Poppy's adventures, first with Ragweed to Bannock Hill, and then through Dimwood Forest to New House, took her well beyond the boundaries set for her family. Have students sketch a map of The Dimwood Region, similar to that shown at the beginning of the book. Have them trace Poppy's paths and highlight where important events took place (Ragweed's death, meeting Ereth, Mr. Ocax's death, etc.).

Understanding Literary Features One theme of the story is exerting undue control over others.

Mr. Ocax would not allow the mice to go beyond a small area without his permission. He would often not reveal the reasons for his decisions if they asked. He would tell them he kept them in the region for their own protection, but he really just wanted them to stay where he could eat them. Ask the students to research and report on a situation in history when a person or persons may have exerted undue control over another group of people. Examples of this would be slavery and Nazi control of the Jewish people.

Understanding Characterization Lungwort, the leader of the mice, had always believed that Mr. Ocax was protecting the mice from other animals. He often showed the young mice pictures of these "ferocious, bloodthirsty" forest beasts. After hearing of Poppy's adventures, the mice will undoubtedly change their views of some of these creatures (porcupines, owls, foxes, cats, etc.) Have the students make "before and after" pictures of how Lungwort would depict these and other forest animals and write a brief description for each one.

Understanding the Author's Craft The story was told in the third person by a narrator. Ask the students to choose a section involving Mr. Ocax and rewrite it from his point of view in the first person. They can tell what the owl might have been thinking when he saw the barn owl at New House, what he really thought of Ragweed or Lungwort, or his thoughts regarding Poppy during her mission through Dimwood Forest.