

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Rabbit Hill

by

Robert Lawson

Book Information

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The Animals of the Hill prepare for the "new Folk" moving into the Big House.

Award: Newbery Medal; SLJ Best Book

Topics: Animals, Misc./Other; Animals, Rabbits; Humor/Funny, Funny; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5

Main Characters

Father Rabbit Little Georgie's father, a wise but verbose rabbit from Kentucky

Gray Fox, Red Buck, Mole other creatures inhabiting the Hill

Little Georgie a well-liked young rabbit whose disappearance causes sorrow among the Animals of the Hill

Mother Rabbit Georgie's mother, a sweet but nervous rabbit

Phewie a skunk who likes to eat the Folks' garbage

Porkey a feisty woodchuck who refuses to move his burrow away from the Big House

the Man and the Lady (the Folks) the middle-aged couple who comes to live in the Big House; they are kind to the Animals

Tim McGrath, Louie Kernstawk the human workmen who think the Folks are strange

Uncle Analdas Mother Rabbit's cantankerous uncle, who comes to spend the summer and leads a group that distrusts the Folks

Willie Fieldmouse a young mouse who falls into the rain barrel and is nursed back to health by the Folks

auspicious occurring under favorable circumstances

bluegrass a grass used in lawns

discourse a long, formal discussion of a subject

gallows a device used for execution by hanging

provender food or provisions

ultimatum a threat that implies serious consequences if certain demands are not met

Synopsis

As the story begins, the Animals on the Hill are passing along an exciting rumor that "new Folks" are coming to live in the Big House on the Hill. The Animals are happy because new Folks might mean a vegetable garden and more food for the rabbits, mice, and deer, and plenty of garbage for Phewie the skunk.

Times have been hard for the creatures on the Hill, and they have often been without enough to eat. The anticipation continues, and Little Georgie Rabbit is sent on an important mission to Danbury to bring his Uncle Analdas home for a summer visit. He completes his task, but not without a narrow escape from one of the country dogs along the way.

As the human workmen begin to prepare the house and garden for the arrival of the Folks, all indications are they are "planting Folks," ones that will grow vegetables and grass that the Animals can take for themselves. After the moving vans come, the workmen are very much surprised that the Folks will allow no poisons, traps, or disturbance of Porkey the Woodchuck's home right next to the house. The workmen believe the Folks' foolishness comes as a result of too much book reading, but the creatures of the Hill are further convinced that these are good Folks.

Their confidence is shaken, however, when Willie Fieldmouse, who has been spying on the folks from the windowsill, turns up missing. Uncle Analdas suspects foul play and leads a group that believes the worst of the humans in the house. Others, like Georgie and his family, still believe the Folks mean no harm. They all soon find out that Willie fell into

Vocabulary

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the rain barrel, was nursed back to health by the Lady, and was allowed to leave the house when he chose.

Each spring, on Dividing Night, the Animals of the Hill decide which vegetables each family will receive at harvest time. As always, the actual harvest of the garden is not to take place until Midsummer's Eve. As the group disbands that evening, they hear the chilling sound of squealing tires and immediately realize Little Georgie has been hit by a car. The animals see the Man carrying a small bundle into the house and hear nothing more from Little Georgie for weeks. Uncle Analdas's suspicions of bad intentions on the part of the Folks are rekindled, and a division occurs between the Animals of the Hill, some doubting the Folks and the others still trusting them.

When Midsummer's Eve comes, the Animals appear at the garden as usual, but they quickly turn their attention to a portion of the garden where the Folks sit quietly next to a strange shape covered with a tarpaulin. As the Animals draw near, all are overjoyed to hear the voice of Little Georgie, who had been helped by the Lady to a full recovery. Next, the Man calmly uncovers the strange shape to reveal a statue of Saint Francis of Assisi, whom the Animals recognize as their protector. At the statue's feet are piles of food of every kind for all the creatures of the hill and woods. Out of gratitude for the kindness of the Folks, the Animals pledge not to touch a single plant from the garden and even vow to stop the cutworms from doing any damage.

Every night that summer, the Lady and Man continue to spread a feast for them at the foot of the saint. By their kindness, they show their animal friends that they believe in the words carved in the stone at the statue's feet: "There is enough for all." The workmen are stunned to discover that, despite not using any deterrents, the Folks' garden has not been touched, while their own crops have been destroyed even though they have used fences, traps, and poisons.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

The Animals in the story are given more than equal footing with any human characters. Review the story carefully. In what ways does the author ensure that this is truly the Animals' story?

Most human characters are portrayed as rather ignorant and those who are not, such as the Man and the Lady, are not even given full names. The word "Animal" is always capitalized, and the majority of the dialogue occurs between the Animals themselves.

Literary Analysis

Rabbit Hill provides a delightful window into an imaginary animal world. What does the author show us about the culture of the animals living on the Hill? What was their "government"? Who was their leader?

The Animals are generally a very friendly and well-organized group, with different species interacting on a daily basis. The orderly Dividing Night is an example of their cooperative, democratic "government," with each family requesting a particular food and quantity. Father Rabbit assumes a leadership role in the community, as does Red Buck.

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Inferential Comprehension

Tim McGrath and Louie Kernstawk have strong opinions about how animals should be "controlled." Contrast their attitude with that of the Folks.

McGrath and Kernstawk assume that the Folks would consider the Animals to be pests and would want to get rid of them by trapping or poisoning them or fencing them out of the garden. When the Folks tell them that they will allow none of this, McGrath and Kernstawk think the Folks are soft in the head from reading too many books. The Folks consider the Hill as much the Animals' home as their own. They prepare the garden in a spirit of cooperation with the Animals, providing them with nightly meals.

Constructing Meaning

What does the statue of St. Francis mean to the Animals?

The Animals know of this saint as one who protected and loved animals when he was alive. The appearance of food and water along with the statue indicates to them that the Folks are now protecting and providing for them, just as the saint had.

Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting In *Rabbit Hill*, the Animals come to an understanding and appreciation of the Folks, but only after they have proved worthy of the Animals' trust. Initiate a class discussion in which the class considers other novels in which the relationship between people and animals is featured. How are people portrayed in each one? Are animals shown as thinking, feeling beings?

Drawing Conclusions The Animals on the Hill watch with great interest as the moving vans are unloaded. They reason that they could tell a lot about the new Folks from their possessions. Ask students to imagine a moving van full of their own possessions. Assign students to write a brief composition about what these possessions would reveal about them to an observer.

Understanding Dialogue Father Rabbit is well-known as a specialist in "discourse" and often uses complicated and flowery language in everyday conversation. As an exercise in creating specific kinds of dialogue, ask students to find five simple declarative sentences from the book and rewrite them as Father Rabbit might have said them, using formal language, sophisticated vocabulary, and plenty of detail. Ask for volunteers to share their dialogue with the class.

Responding to Literature Uncle Analdas is always the first to assume the worst about the Folks, and he influences others to share his thinking by spreading rumors and suspicion. As a class writing assignment, ask students to consider a time when they were influenced by rumors. Assign students to write two to three paragraphs about the person who influenced them and whether or not the rumor turned out to be true. What conclusions can they draw about the reliability of rumors?