

Ralph S. Mouse

by

Beverly Cleary

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## Book Information

Beverly Cleary, Ralph S. Mouse

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160 Pages

Book Level: 5.1

Interest Level: MG

Ralph, the motorcycle-riding mouse, is off on another adventure and acquires a new sports car to replace his broken motorcycle.

**Topics:** Animals, Mice; Humor/Funny, Funny; Transportation/Vehicles, Cars/Trucks

## Main Characters

Brad one of Ryan's classmates, whom Ryan does not like

Matt the hotel handyman and bellboy

Miss Kuckenbacker (Miss K) Ryan's school teacher

Mr. Crossman the superintendent of the school

Mr. Minch the hotel manager

Mr. Tanner the principal of the school

Mrs. Bramble Ryan's mother, who is the hotel housekeeper

Ralph S. Mouse a mouse who lives in the hotel and rides a motorcycle

Ryan Bramble the son of the hotel housekeeper; Ralph's best friend

## Vocabulary

**haiku** a non-rhyming Japanese poem that has three lines and seventeen syllables

**indignation** anger

**limerick** a humorous, five-line, rhyming poem

**nocturnal** active at night rather than during the day

**plague** an abundance of something that causes great trouble

**ventriloquist** a person who can speak without moving the lips to make it appear the voice is coming from another source

## Synopsis

Ralph is a mouse who lives in the lobby of the Mountain View Inn. His friends are Ryan, the hotel housekeeper's son, and Matt, the hotel handyman. Matt and Ryan, unlike most people, can understand Ralph's speech, and they try to help him as much as they can. One morning, after a night of riding his motorcycle, Ralph hears that Mr. Minch, the hotel manager, is upset about all the mouse droppings in the lobby. Mr. Minch threatens to fire Matt if he does not get rid of the mice. Ralph decides he must leave the hotel to keep his family out of danger and to keep Matt from losing his job.

Ralph begs Ryan to take him to school so he can live there. Ryan agrees and takes Ralph to school. He even allows Ralph to stay in his shirt pocket but warns him to stay out of sight. Ryan's classmates, however, soon discover Ralph peeking out of Ryan's shirt pocket.

The students are fascinated by Ralph, so Ryan's teacher, Miss K, decides to do a class project on mice. Part of this project includes Ryan working with another student, Brad, on a maze for Ralph to run through. Ryan and Brad do not get along with each other, but Miss K hopes that working on the maze together will help them to become friends. Ralph hates the idea of having to run through a maze, but Ryan threatens to keep Ralph's motorcycle until he runs the maze. Shortly after Ryan and Brad get into a fight and the motorcycle is broken. Ralph is very upset and decides to talk to Brad. Through this conversation, Ralph begins to understand Brad's loneliness, and Brad begins to understand some things about Ryan. Brad and Ryan become friends, return Ralph to the hotel, and give him a sports car to replace the broken motorcycle. Ralph loves his new car and enjoys being back at the hotel.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

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#### Initial Understanding

Why does Miss K suggest that Ryan and Brad work together to build the maze?

*Miss K already realizes that Ryan and Brad do not get along well, so she wants to give them an opportunity to get to know each other better and become friends. While they fight at first, their arguments bring their misunderstandings to the surface. Once their differences are cleared up, they do become friends.*

#### Literary Analysis

The author makes Ralph an interesting character by giving him a human personality, yet Ralph still has traits that are typical of mice and not humans. In what ways does Ralph show mouse characteristics, and in what ways does he show human qualities?

*Ralph is a typical mouse in that he likes to sleep during the day rather than at night, he eats seeds, he sleeps in a pile of shredded paper, and he chews holes in things. He shows human qualities in that he can talk, ride a motorcycle, share feelings such as love, and think about how to solve problems.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

How did Ralph change over the course of the book?

*At the beginning of the book, Ralph is somewhat selfish in not wanting to share his motorcycle with his relatives. He is also short tempered with them and with Ryan. By the end of the book, though, he has learned from Miss K that fighting does not solve problems. He also has learned more about friendship, kindness, and sharing from seeing Ryan and Brad solve their differences and become friends. When Ralph returns to the hotel, he treats his little relatives much better than he did before.*

#### Constructing Meaning

A fact is a statement that can be proven as being true. An opinion is a personal judgment, so it cannot be labeled as being either true or false. Identify several facts and opinions from the story and explain why each is a fact or an opinion.

*Students should give direct quotes from the book and indicate whether or not they could be verified. For example, in chapter one, it is stated that Ryan lives in the hotel. This could be considered a fact because his place of residence could be verified. In chapter three, on the other hand, one of the children says that Ralph is cute. This is an opinion because it is a personal judgment that cannot be verified as either true or false.*

#### Teachable Skills

**Identifying Persuasive Language** Ralph's older cousins agree to keep his new car a secret from the younger mice. Imagine, however, that Ralph's little cousins find out that he has a sports car. How might they try to persuade Ralph to let them drive the car? What arguments would be most effective? Have students compose five arguments they could use to try to persuade him. Students could also write Ralph's response to their arguments.

**Understanding the Main Idea** Ralph learns lessons about friendship from Ryan and Brad and about kindness from Miss K. Ask students to compile a list of five ways to be a friend and five ways to show kindness to others. For example, do not make judgments about a person without knowing all the facts. It is better to get someone's attention by being quiet than by yelling, etc.

**Drawing Conclusions** Although Ralph does not like running the maze, he does learn from it. Have your students construct mazes individually or in groups. If possible, have a volunteer bring in a pet mouse, guinea pig, hamster, or gerbil. Have the animal run the maze five to ten times and record the time taken each time. Evaluate the results and draw conclusions as a class. If pets are not available, have students draw mazes on

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paper. Make several photocopies of each, exchange mazes, and have students be "guinea pigs," by timing them. Record results, evaluate, and draw conclusions. How quickly did student learn their mazes?

**Responding to Literature** Ralph's motorcycle is his favorite possession. Ask students to identify their favorite possession and explain what makes it their favorite. Ask volunteers to bring in their favorite possessions, if appropriate, for show and tell.