

Redwall by Brian Jacques

Book Information

Brian Jacques, Redwall
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Interest Level: MG

The peaceful life of ancient Redwall Abbey is shattered by the arrival of the evil rat Cluny and his villainous hordes. Matthias determines to find the legendary sword of Martin the Warrior which, he is convinced, will help destroy the enemy.

Award: ALA Best Book for Young Adults

Topics: Animals, Rats; Fantasy/Imagination, Fantasy; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, Elementary School Library Collection; Series, Redwall

Main Characters

Abbot Mortimer head of the order who thinks of Matthias as a son

Ambrose Spike a hedgehog, who warns the woodland animals at the beginning

Asmodeus an adder who has the sword of Martin

Basil Stag Hare an "expert scout, hind leg fighter, wilderness guide and camouflage specialist"

Brother Alf becomes the Abbot when Abbot Mortimer dies

Captain Snow a snowy owl who used to live in the barn with Julian; he tells Matthias where to find Asmodeus's lair

Cheesethief Cluny's second second-in-command

Chickenhound Sela's son who kills Methuselah and is killed by Asmodeus

Cluny the crafty, merciless, evil rat leader

Constance a badger, strong in the defense of Redwall

Cornflower pretty field mouse, attracted to Matthias

Darkclaw one of the rats higher up in Cluny's horde

Dunwing Warbeak's mother, she befriends Matthias and helps him escape from King Bull Sparra

Fangburn one of the rats higher up in Cluny's horde

Foremole the chief mole; he attempts to foil the horde's plan to tunnel into the Abbey

Friar Hugo the Abbey's chef

Guosim the president of the Guerrilla Union of Shrews in Mossflower; she is killed by Asmodeus

Jess Squirrel Silent Sam's mother; climbs the Abbey roof to the weather vane and later she and Basil recover the tapestry of Martin

John and Mrs. Churchmouse Tim and Tess's parents, John becomes the new Abbey recorder at the end

Killconey a ferret who serves Cluny

King Bull Sparra Dunwing's brother, the mad ruler of the sparrows

Log-a-Log a wise elder of the shrews

Martin the founder of Redwall Abbey, who lives on through Matthias

Matthias an orphan mouse, the hero of the story

Methuselah the gatekeeper and records keeper, who helps Matthias find Martin's tomb

Plumpen the dormouse who opens a door to the Abbey and lets Cluny enter

Redtooth Cluny's second-in-command at the beginning of the book

Sela the vixen a healer called in to help Cluny and who sells information to both sides

Shadow a rat or weasel, he steals the part of the tapestry with the picture of Martin

Silent Sam a young squirrel who helps Matthias when Matthias is lost in Mossflower Woods

Squire Julian Gingivere a ginger cat who only eats fish and herbs and grasses

Tim and Tess the twin Churchmice babies, cuddled by Matthias and Cornflower at the feast at the beginning of the book

Warbeak the sparrow who is wounded when the sparrows attack Jess squirrel; she eventually becomes Matthias's friend and Queen of the sparrows

Winifred an otter, who helps defend the Abbey

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Redwall

by

Brian Jacques

Vocabulary

- cavort** to prance or caper
- curmudgeon** a cantankerous person
- curtilage** a yard within the fence surrounding a house
- gyrate** to revolve round a central point
- leveret** a hare in its first year
- obsidian** black and shiny
- sultana** a pale-yellow seedless grape
- tiffin** luncheon

Synopsis

This story is told in the third person from various points of view, depending on what the author is trying to convey. It involves two different storylines. In one, Cluny the Scourge is trying to breach the defences of Redwall Abbey. Cluny, a rat, is an evil, merciless tyrant. He vows to kill all of Redwall's defenders and enslave all the rest of the woodland creatures when he succeeds in taking the Abbey. Cluny tries to enter Redwall using grappling hooks and ladders against the walls, by trying to bridge the gap between a tree and the top of the wall, by using a battering ram against the main gate, by digging under the walls, and with a siege tower. He finally enters by persuading a dormouse to open a door in the wall by threatening to burn the dormouse's family to death.

At the same time, Matthias is on a quest for Martin the Warrior's sword. This quest was sparked by Cluny's attack on Redwall. Methuselah, the records keeper, finds a riddle carved into the wall behind the part of the tapestry containing the picture of Martin the Warrior. He and Matthias solve the riddle, find Martin's tomb, and eventually figure out where the sword should be. Fairly certain that it has been stolen by the sparrows, Matthias goes to the realm of the sparrows and learns that the sword has been stolen from them by Asmodeus, the adder who hunts in Mossflower Woods. He seeks out a snowy owl in order to find Asmodeus's lair, and is helped on his way by shrews. They find the secret entrance to the lair, where Matthias takes the sword and kills

Asmodeus. Matthias returns to the Abbey to find Cluny threatening to kill all the defenders. He and Cluny fight, and he finally defeats Cluny by dropping the large Abbey bell on him.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Dunwing's escape plan for Matthias involved several steps. Describe them.

Warbeak was to tell Methuselah to send Jess Squirrel up to the roof with a climbing rope. In the meantime, Dunwing would spread a rumor about Asmodeus that would draw all the warrior sparrows to the woods. Matthias was to steal back the belt and steal the scabbard, then climb to the roof to await Jess.

Literary Analysis

Why do you think the author chose to use a shifting point of view in this book?

He wants the reader to know everything that is going on everywhere. If the book were told from only Matthias's point of view, we would not know what is going on in the Abbey when Matthias is not there.

Inferential Comprehension

What were some of the effects of Shadow's theft of the piece of tapestry?

On the one hand, the theft had a demoralizing effect on the defenders of Redwall. On the other hand, the theft sparked Matthias's first connection with Martin (the dream of Martin calling for help), and also revealed the riddle carved on the wall.

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Constructing Meaning

This book has many suspenseful moments. Which did you find most suspenseful. Why?

There are many possible responses to this question. Matthias finding himself in the cat's mouth is one. Learning about Cluny's real plan to tunnel under the Abbey walls is another. Also, the close call with the siege tower is a suspenseful moment. Other possible responses: Asmodeus nearly hypnotizes and kills Matthias, and Cluny grabs Friar Hugo and wants Matthias to surrender.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting In this book we have animals that must be their real size, since they are in proportion to each other (mice are about the size of sparrows, rats are larger than mice, etc.), and the mice shoot "tiny arrows." From this we might assume that the Abbey walls are perhaps four or five feet high. And yet the sparrows roost under the roof, and the trees are about as high as the wall. Have the students find other examples of confusion of scale. They might be interested in determining what size they think things must be.

Recognizing Setting In this book Winifred and Foremole adapt a seesaw into a weapon of war, using it as a sort of catapult or ballista. The students might be interested in building a small catapult and using it carefully to see how much weight it takes to move an object, what path the projectile takes, at what angle, and how far, etc. Can they think of any other toys that could be adapted for use in a war that takes place during the same time period?

Understanding the Author's Craft This book's point of view changes from character to character, while remaining in the third person. Have the students rewrite some event in the book from one point of view. If they choose Matthias, how will they let the reader know what is happening in the Abbey or what Cluny is up to? Do they think it matters if the reader doesn't know everything at the same time? For instance,

Matthias could learn what is going on in the Abbey when he returns.

Understanding the Author's Craft At the end of the book, voices tell Cluny that before sunset he will be free of his nightmares forever. He erroneously assumes that the voices mean he will kill Matthias. The misunderstood prophecy is a device other authors have used, notably Shakespeare in Macbeth. Have the students compare what Macbeth thought the witches' prophecies meant to what Cluny thought of his inner voices. Have the students do some research and find other stories using this device.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning This book contains many descriptive comparisons. Within one paragraph on page 72 we have Shadow moving "like a sinuous black lizard," "gently as a night breeze," and "gliding like a cloud's shadow." Have the students find other comparisons. Do the students find them effective? Have the students write their own similes or metaphors to describe things or events in this book or in their lives.