

Mr. Popper's Penguins



By

Richard & Florence Atwater

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This 75 page curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one or two chapters of **Mr. Popper's Penguins** and is comprised of four sections:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include the Antarctic, penguins, explorers, family and family responsibilities; perseverance; self-acceptance.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms & antonyms
3. Identifying/creating *onomatopoeia*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Listing compound words
7. Identifying *sarcasm*
8. Identifying/creating *personification*
9. Use of singular/plural nouns
10. Using content clues: *analogies*
11. Identifying parts of speech
12. Determining alphabetical order
13. Identification of root words
14. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
15. Identifying *anagrams*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a 5 W's Chart
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify *cliffhanger*
4. Identify the climax of a novel
5. Write a synopsis
6. Predict an outcome
7. Complete a Sequence Chart
8. Identify *foreshadowing*

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Compare two characters
3. Relating personal experiences

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper article
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Chart
5. Conduct an interview
6. Create a journal entry
7. Write a Book Review
8. Using technology as a resource

Art Activities

1. Design a cover for the novel
2. Create a collector's card
3. Create a Storyboard.

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Synopsis

The lovable Mr. Popper dreams of being an intrepid Antarctic explorer; living life among the penguins alongside his hero, Admiral Drake. So he is shocked one day when the Admiral responds to his fan letter by sending him a package containing a real, live penguin! Soon, this penguin is joined by another; and before long Mr. Popper has an ice rink in the basement and a dozen delightful penguins living in his house. With hardly enough money to feed his family, and an ever-increasing bill for raw fish and canned shrimp, what can the wonderfully imaginative Mr. Popper do but train his penguins and take the show on the road! (Summary courtesy of the Publisher)

Author Biography

Richard and Florence Atwater

Florence Hasseltine Atwater (née **Carroll**; September 13, 1896–August 23, 1979) was born in Chicago, the last child of Mary Josephine ("Minnie") Delany, a former concert pianist with the Philadelphia Conservatory, and James Carroll, a Philadelphia publisher. As Florence Carroll, she obtained her AB and MA in French literature at the University of Chicago (1920) where she was co-editor of *The Chicago Literary Monthly*, and student of Richard Atwater. They married in 1921 and had two children, Doris (1922-2000) and Carroll (1925-2013).



Richard Tupper Atwater (December 29, 1892–August 21, 1948) was a Chicago writer and classics professor at the University of Chicago. He is probably best known as the co-author, with his wife Florence, of the book *Mr. Poppers Penguins*. He contributed to the literary and arts magazine *The Chicagoan* and wrote for a number of newspapers, including the *Chicago Evening Post*, the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Herald-Examiner*. He also taught Classical Greek at the University of Chicago.

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Name: _____

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Chapter 1



Before you read the chapter:

Every good novel needs an interesting **protagonist** (the novel's main character). In Chapter One we meet a character that you will probably instinctively like. Why is it usually quite important for an author to create a main character who is liked or admired by the reader?



Vocabulary:

Match each word with its definition.

1.	calcimine
2.	bungalow
3.	expedition
4.	expanse
5.	regret
6.	daresay
7.	decorate
8.	litter
9.	authority
10.	vacation

a.	a wide extent of anything (i.e. sea)
b.	a one-story home
c.	assume
d.	objects scattered about
e.	the right to control or command
f.	excursion; journey
g.	holiday
h.	a white or tinted wash for walls, ceilings, etc.
i.	to furnish or adorn
j.	to feel sorrow or remorse

Questions



1. Describe the **setting** of Chapter One..

2. Think of four appropriate words to describe the personality of Mr. Popper.

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3. What was Mr. Popper's biggest regret?

4. On what subject was Mr. Popper an authority?

5. There is an example of **foreshadowing** in this chapter when the author states, "... no one guessed that he (Mr. Popper) would one day be the most famous person in Stillwater." How do you think Mr. Popper would one day become so famous?

6. Mr. Popper's children were called _____ and _____.

7. Why did Mr. Popper have so little work to do during the winter?

b. This caused Mrs. Popper some concern. What were the two worries expressed by her in this regard?

Language Activities



A. Antarctica

Polar exploration is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has been devised." [Apsley Cherry-Garrard.]

Mr. Popper considers himself to be something of an expert on Antarctica.



Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research at least four interesting facts about **Antarctica**. This might have to do with its

climate, landforms, history, explorers, animal life, etc.

1	
2	
3	
4	

Fascinating Facts

The Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1959 by 12 nations and now joined by over 50, preserves Antarctica for peaceful and scientific use only—prohibiting military activity and mineral mining. Some find it strange that it remains one of the few international treaties never broken and that independent, unsupervised exploration is heavily restricted, sparking speculation about what might be hidden there.



B. Who is going to help the poor old action word?

An **adverb** is a part of speech defined as *a modifier (or helper) of a verb (usually an action word)*. Often an adverb will end in the letters **ly** (i.e. **slowly**). The novel features a good many creative adverbs.

- *the penguins were feeling the heat badly.*

In this sentence, what verb does **badly** modify? _____

- *the curtain was quickly rung down.*

In this sentence, what verb does **quickly** modify? _____

- *they could scarcely believe their eyes.*

In this sentence, the adverb _____ modifies the verb _____.

C. Richard and Florence Atwater

The story of how Mr. Popper's Penguins was written by Mr. and Mrs. Atwater is quite fascinating. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet investigate how the writing of this book came about.



D. Cinquain Poems

A Cinquain poem has five lines and most often does not rhyme. Write two Cinquain poems describing two of the characters from *Mr. Popper's Penguins* using what you know about them from this novel. With your teacher's permission you may wish to collaborate with a colleague in the creation of these poems.

Line 1 is one word. Line 2 is two words. Line 3 is three words. Line 4 is four words. Line five is one word.	<i>Santa Saint Nick Long white beard Christmas Eve present-giver Jolly</i>
--	--

Character 1 _____

Character 2 _____

Extension Activity



A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words

Use the three boxes to describe and illustrate the beginning, middle and conclusion of this chapter.



Beginning Picture:	Beginning:
Middle Picture:	Middle:
Concluding Picture:	Concluding: