

The Tale of Despereaux



By

Kate DiCamillo

A Novel Study
by Joel Michel Reed

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on several chapters of *The Tale of Despereaux* and is comprised of five of the following activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language Activities
- Extension Activities

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.**

A principal expectation of the unit is that students will develop their skills in reading, writing, listening and oral communication, as well as in reasoning and critical thinking. Students will also be expected to provide clear answers to questions and well-constructed explanations. It is critical as well that students be able to relate events and the feelings of characters to their own lives and experiences and describe their own interpretation of a particular passage.

A strength of the unit is that students can work on the activities at their own pace. Every activity need not be completed by all students. A **portfolio cover** is included (p.7) so that students may organize their work and keep it all in one place. A **Student Checklist** is also included (p.6) so that a record of completed work may be recorded.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homonyms
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *foreshadowing*.
7. Identify *personification*
8. Use of singular / plural nouns
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identify/create *similes*
13. Identify *anagrams*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Relating personal experiences

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Write a description of personal feelings
6. Write a book review
7. Complete an Observation Sheet
8. Complete a KWS Chart

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Create an Information Card
4. Design a cover for the novel
5. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

The novel is divided into four books. Book I covers Despereaux's childhood; Book II focuses on Roscuro, a dungeon rat with a mysterious past. The third book is about Miggery Sow, a servant girl who is sold by her father for a red table cloth, a handful of cigarettes and a hen. The first three books are set years apart, all building up to the fourth book, which concludes the novel. (Courtesy of Wikipedia)

A complete synopsis can be found on the following website:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tale_Of_Despereaux

Author Biography

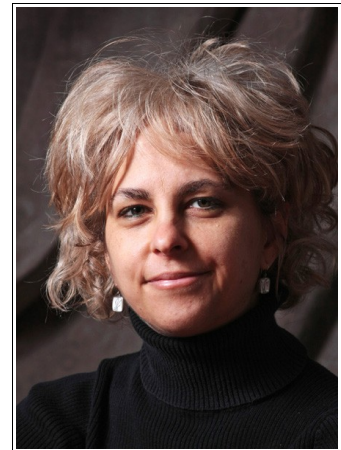
Kate DiCamillo

Katrina Elizabeth "Kate" DiCamillo (born March 25, 1964) Born in Philadelphia, DiCamillo suffered from chronic pneumonia. At age five, she moved to Clermont, Florida for her health (warmer climate) with her mother and her older brother Curt DiCamillo, who would become a noted architectural historian. Her mother was a teacher. Her father remained in Pennsylvania to sell his orthodontic practice and never rejoined the family in Florida.

DiCamillo earned her college degree in English at the University of Florida in 1987 and worked in Florida after graduation. At age 30 she moved to Minneapolis and began working at a book warehouse. That job inspired her to write for children and allowed her to meet a sales representative for Candlewick Press, resulting in submission of a draft that would become *Because of Winn-Dixie*.

Her 2003 novel *The Tale of Despereaux* was inspired by a friend's son, Luke Bailey, who asked her to write about an unlikely hero with "exceptionally large ears".

(Courtesy of Wikipedia) - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kate_DiCamillo



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Name: _____

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Book The First Chapters 1-5



Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. Think back on some of your favourite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an especially interesting **protagonist**?

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Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

| | | | |
|-----------|----------|--------------|------------|
| Obscenely | Florence | Handkerchief | Reflecting |
| Wonder | Shoulder | Crumbs | Music |
| Shoulder | Gertrude | Remarkable | Bowstrings |

1. It is true. Despereaux's eyes should not have been open. But they were. He was staring at the sun _____ off his mothers mirror.
2. He's the smallest mouse I've ever seen," said his Aunt _____. "Its ridiculous."

3. He was ridiculously small. His ears were _____ large.
4. "Son!" barked Despereaux's father. "Snap to it. Get your head out of the clouds and hunt for _____."
5. "Look over your _____ all the time, first to the right, then to the left."
6. Despereaux looked down at the book, and something _____ happened. The marks on the pages, the *squiggles* as Merlot referred to them, arranged themselves into shapes.
7. He shivered. He sneezed. He blew his nose into his _____.
8. He stuck his left ear out of the hole in the wall so that he could hear the _____ better, and then he stuck his right ear out so that he could hear better still.
9. Despereaux stared up in _____.
10. "Cripes!" said Furlough. He stopped. He stared into the princess's room. His whiskers became as tight as _____.

Questions



1. Describe the setting as Chapter One begins.

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2. Why did Despereaux's mother name him 'Despereaux'?

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3. Describe Despereaux's appearance.

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4. Why was Despereaux's family so concerned about him?

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5. What was the sound that Despereaux described as sounding like honey and heaven?

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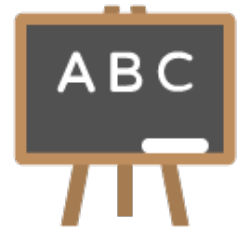
6. What happened when Despereaux laid eyes on Princess Pea?

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Language Activities



A. Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's one such example: “. . . **g**rouching, **g**rouching, **g**rumbling about something or other.”



Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| The bark of a dog. | |
| Someone strumming a guitar. | |
| Birds chirping. | |

B. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example from Chapter One is “. . . *Those are some big ears he's got, too,*” observed his uncle Alfred. “*They look more like donkey ears, if you ask me.*”



What two things are being compared in this example?

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Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) A woman with a large nose.

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b) A man hitting a baseball.

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C. A Mouse Hunt!

It's likely that Despereaux Tilling is either a common house mouse, a field mouse, or possibly the white-footed mouse. As a matter of fact, there are well over one hundred different species of mice in the world, so Despereaux could be any one of these mice!



Using resources in your school library or on the Internet research as many different species of mice, and paste (or draw) a picture of the mouse that you believe resembles Despereaux Tilling.

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Extension Activity



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel.



Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first 5 chapters of the novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | 2 |
| 3 | 4 |
| 5 | 6 |