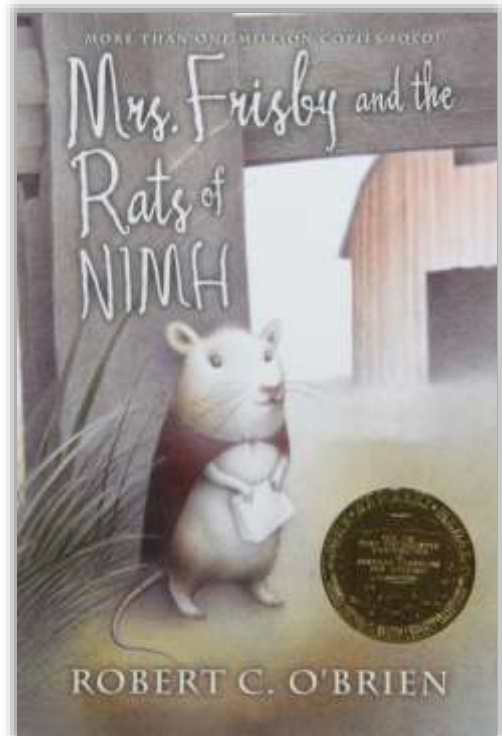


# Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH

By Robert C. O'Brien

Moving day is coming unexpectedly early this year. Although there is still a crisp chill in the air, the ground has already begun to thaw. All the creatures who have spent the winter living and foraging for leftovers between the furrows of Farmer Fitzgibbon's vegetable garden know they have to move to the woods before his tractor comes out of the barn. If Mrs. Frisby and her four children don't leave their cozy, cinder block home at the center of the garden soon, they won't survive.

As each day gets a little warmer and the ground gets a little softer, Mrs. Frisby grows more desperate. Her youngest son Timothy has become dangerously ill and can't be moved. He wouldn't survive the cold, half-day journey. She refuses to leave her helpless son behind, but she doesn't know how to save him. If only her husband Jonathan were still alive, he'd know just what to do. He might even ask those mysterious rats living under the rosebush for help! Now Mrs. Frisby must find a solution all on her own. Will this tiny, widowed mouse have the wits and courage it takes to visit the most dangerous predator in the neighborhood, venture under the forbidding rosebush at the edge of the lawn, and befriend the most unlikely allies, all while keeping a wary eye out for the Fitzgibbons' blood-thirsty cat? And if she does, will it be enough to save her family in time?



## About the Author

Robert C. O'Brien was very private, so little is known about his life and interests. He was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1918. He was the third of five children and grew up in Amityville, New York. After earning a degree in English from the University of Rochester, he began a long career as a reporter. He worked for *National Geographic* for over twenty years, which gave him the opportunity to travel around the world. Toward the end of his career, he served as senior assistant editor of the magazine as well. In the meantime, O'Brien married and became a father of four children. O'Brien did not begin writing novels until he was in his late 40s, and, even then, he wrote under a pen name so none of his *National Geographic* readers would know! O'Brien's real name was Robert Leslie Conly. Before his untimely death at age fifty-five, he wrote three novels, including *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, which won the prestigious Newbery Award in 1972 and was adapted into the animated film *The Secret of NIMH* in 1982. O'Brien's daughter Jane Leslie Conly took up her father's torch and wrote two sequels to complete the NIMH series. She continued writing novels of her own and has become an award-winning author as well.

## Getting Started

You can find *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* at your local or school library, or at local or online bookstores. It's also available as an ebook for your iPad, Kindle, or Nook.

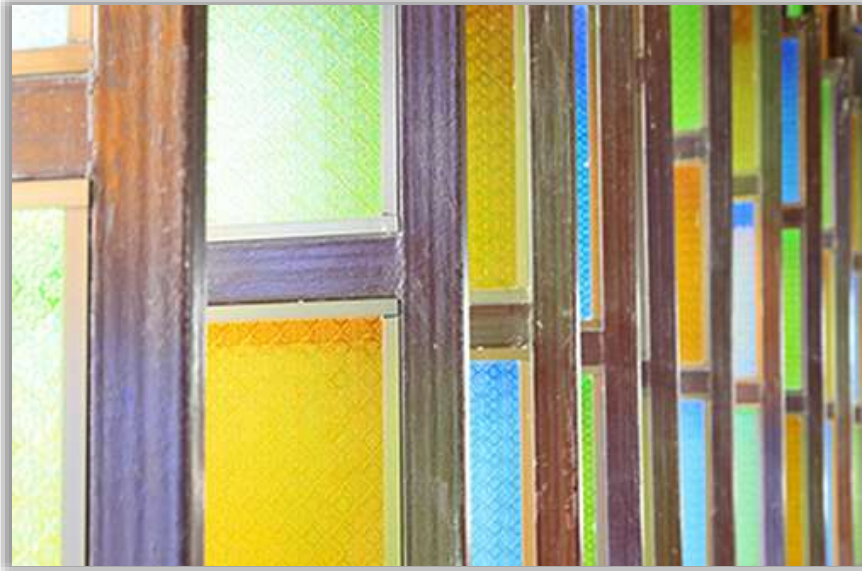
# While You're Reading

Every good story is full of captivating characters, timeless and timely themes, significant settings, pivotal plot points, and vivid vocabulary that combine to engage our brains and our hearts. In this section of the website, you will find activities that invite you to dig deeper into each of these literary elements for a better understanding and enjoyment of the book.

To aid your investigation, save our "Writing While You Read" guide (see pages 17 and 18), with helpful tips on keeping a reading journal and annotating a book while you read.

## **Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) the first half of *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*.**

- The key way a writer helps his or her readers connect with a story is through its characters. Which qualities, behaviors, and choices do you think make some characters more appealing than others? To help you answer this question with specific evidence from the book, use the Character Grid you'll find on pages 19 and 20 below (and you can make extra copies of page 20 if you need them). Tuck it inside your book, and, each time you meet a new character, take a minute to jot down the name and your initial observations about him or her on your Character Grid. Be sure to revisit your Grid every few chapters or so, too! There may be more ideas you want to add as you get to know each character better.
- Based on what you have read in the first few chapters, describe the Frisby family. What makes each family member unique? How do the Frisbys interact with one another and the neighborhood around them? What challenges do they face?
- Although Mr. Frisby has died, and therefore does not appear in this book, what can you tell about him based on what Mrs. Frisby and the other characters say and remember about him? What kind of husband, father, and friend was he? Does it surprise you in any way that Mrs. Frisby was married to him? Why (or why not)?
- One day, early in the novel, Mrs. Frisby ventures out to see what Mr. Fitzgibbon and his sons are doing with their tractor. Although she is ordinarily very cautious, she is so preoccupied by the farmers' conversation that she forgets to watch out for their cat! She scurries to safety, "scold[ing] herself for having been so careless. If the cat had killed her, who would take care of the children?" (36). In what way(s) do Mrs. Frisby and her children help readers better understand the unusual challenges single parents, and children of single parents, face?
- When Mrs. Frisby meets the wise old owl, he is a bit surprised to learn how she came to befriend Jeremy the crow. Then he admits, "That is possible. . . . though unusual. I have heard of such a thing before. We all help one another against the cat" (50). What do you think the owl means by this? What surprises you about this statement and the way the owl behaves toward Mrs. Frisby?



- How does Mrs. Frisby react when she sees the rats' home underneath the rosebush? How does their home compare to her own? In your journal, draw a Venn diagram (see pages 21 and 22 below) to help you visualize the similarities and differences between the Frisbys' and the rats' homes. Which features stand out most to you? Why?
- To help you visualize the problem Mrs. Frisby and the rats are facing, draw a picture of the Frisbys' cinder block

home and the surrounding garden in your journal. Why is the cinder block in such a dangerous position? How must it be moved to be safe from the tractor? If you were designing a plan to move the Frisby's home, how would you do it?

- *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* has an unusual plot structure. One storyline follows Mrs. Frisby as she attempts to save her home, and Timothy, from Mr. Fitzgibbon's tractor. This series of events makes up the novel's frame story. Within that story, though, there is another. When Mrs. Frisby visits the rats under the rosebush, she begins to learn just how they came to live on the Fitzgibbons' farm. For many chapters—as Nicodemus, Justin, and the other rats tell their story—Mrs. Frisby's problem is put on hold while the rats tell theirs. In what way(s) does the rats' story-within-a-story help Mrs. Frisby's life with her husband, and the rats' ability to help her, make more sense? Do you think the rats' story is believable? Why (or why not)?

**Respond to the following prompts in your Reading Journal as you read (or re-read) the second half of *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*:**

- Take a closer look at the illustrations you've encountered so far throughout the book. These illustrations were created by Zena Bernstein, an artist who lives in Ontario, Canada. What do you notice about the overall style of these illustrations? Choose one illustration to study even more closely. Why do you think Bernstein has chosen to call attention to this particular moment in the story through her artwork? How does the illustration help you, the reader, better understand what is happening in that moment?
- "Fiction is characters in conflict." --Sherwood Wirt, professional journalist & author

As you've probably already noticed, many of the characters we meet in literature or film are in the midst of a conflict. In fact, many people argue that without conflict, there is no story! A story's conflict—and how the main characters respond to it—keeps the story moving forward, makes it interesting, and gives it more meaning for readers. The four most common types of conflict are: person versus person, person vs. society, person vs. nature, and person vs. self. With which type(s) of conflict do you see the main characters in *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* struggling? How so? Remember to include specific evidence from the book to support your answer.

- The rats spend eight months living in the vacant mansion on the Bonniface Estate, reading their way through the Estate's extensive library. How does this information change the rats' way of seeing themselves and their role in the world? How does their new found knowledge affect their planning for the future? Be sure to reference specific evidence from the book to support your answer.



- One of the most important things the author, Robert C. O'Brien, does with this book is challenge us to think about animal captivity and testing from the animals' point of view. What are some reasons we humans capture animals and keep them for scientific study in zoos, classrooms, and laboratories like the one at NIMH (The National Institute of Mental Health in Maryland)? What do you see as the potential benefits of doing so? What are the potential downsides? In your journal, create a pro/con list to help you weigh the positives and negatives. In what way(s) are you beginning to see this issue differently because of your experience reading *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*?
- As a way of explaining the reason the rats want to move to Thorn Valley, rather than stay in their comfortable home underneath the rosebush, Nicodemus tells Mrs. Frisby about a memorable story he read while at the Bonniface Estate: "It was about a woman in a small town who bought a vacuum cleaner. Her name was Mrs Jones . . ." (169). In the story, Mrs. Jones' purchase sets in motion a chain of events that changes day-to-day life for her entire community. In what way(s) has this "Rat Race" story helped Nicodemus and his friends realize that "even with [their] make-work projects," their "life [is] too easy" (170)? Does this story help you think differently about the ways in which we humans occupy our time? How so? Be sure to include specific examples to support your answer.
- Do you see the ending of this book as hopeful, hopeless, or somewhere in between? Why? Take another look at the final few chapters. What clues (in the details, events, or characters' words) give you a sense of what will happen next for these characters?
- Now that you have finished the book, look back over the notes you have made on your Character Grid. Group the characters according to those who have some connection to NIMH (the escapees and their children) and those who do not. What behaviors and qualities do the two groups have in common? How are the two groups different? Draw a Venn diagram (pages 21 and 22) in your journal to help you visualize the similarities and differences.

- Using a literary technique called anthropomorphism, the author has given all of the animal characters in the novel various humanlike qualities. Which group of characters seems the most humanlike to you? How so? Why do you think that might be?
- By the end of the book, the partnership between Mrs. Frisby and the rats has clearly been mutually beneficial. After all, Mrs. Frisby's home could never have been moved without the rats' help, and the rats would never have escaped the NIMH scientists' attack on the rosebush if Mrs. Frisby hadn't warned them. What message, or theme, do you think the author is trying to get across to readers by highlighting animal cooperation in this way? What can we humans learn by sharing in Mrs. Frisby's and the rats' [ordeals](#)? Why?

## Getting to the Root



English is a living language. It changes and grows all the time. One of the best ways to understand the history of the English language and to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words is to learn Latin and Greek word parts. As you study biology, you will learn more and more of these word parts, and once you know them, you will begin to recognize them in all kinds of words—and you'll find that your knowledge of those word parts will help you decipher the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Roots are the "base" of plants, and Latin and Greek roots form the base of many English words. For example, the Latin root *audi* means "to hear." How many modern English words can you think of that include the root *audi*?

Next, take a look at each word part below. Beside each part is a word from *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* containing that word part. You can find the word in context on the page number in parentheses.

- **pro, trud** – **protruded** (6)
- **hyp, chondr** – **hypochondriac** (10)
- **pneu, mon** – **pneumonia** (18)
- **vac** – **vacant** (101)
- **in, ciner** – **incinerator** (103)
- **de, liber** – **deliberation** (231)

1. Can you determine the meaning of the root from your knowledge of the word beside it?
2. If not, think of other words that you know that also contain that root. What do those words have in common? Based on that common element, can you figure out the meaning of the root?
3. If you're still stumped, check out this [list of Latin and Greek roots](#).
4. Now that you know the meaning of the root, how many words can you generate that use the root?
5. Once you understand the meaning of the root, you'll find that even your understanding and appreciation of familiar words will deepen and grow when you think about how that root works in those words.

## Words, Words, Words

*Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* is full of great words. Below is a list of some of the words from the book that may be unfamiliar to you, along with the page number on which each word appears in the story. Be sure to follow the steps below for other words in the book that are new to you.

- scarce (3)
- rancid (4)
- lath (9)
- draughts (14)
- invariably (21)
- intrude (50)
- deference (55)
- dense (65)
- irrelevantly (87)
- efficient (89)
- commercial (101)
- inextricably (104)
- futile (107)
- injection (108)
- illusion (114)
- astute (132)
- plaintive (135)
- monasteries (159)
- slums (160)
- rodent (161)
- epidemic (192)
- extermination (193)
- defiant (201)
- inexorable (219)
- elaborate (224)



**Before you look these words up in a dictionary**—or ask someone what they mean—try working through the following steps:

1. Generate a list of other words that share one or more of the same word parts. What do the words on the list have in common? Are there any clues from those commonalities that you can use to help figure out the meaning of the unknown word? Hint: Some word parts—as they appear in English words—have multiple meanings as we look back at the Latin and Greek, in part because of changes that have occurred in the words over the years. For example, does the "ped-" in "pedestrian" mean the same thing as the "ped" in "pediatrician"? Where there is possible confusion, or when you don't see familiar word parts, context clues (see step 2) are extremely important.
2. Go back and reread the word in its context. This context includes the sentence in which you find the word, but you should also read one or two sentences both before and after the appearance of the word. What context clues do you find that might unlock the meaning of the word for you?
3. Make your best guess at the meaning of the word.
4. Look up the definition in [a dictionary](#). Be sure to also look for information about the word's origin. This information will often contain the Latin or Greek word from which the word is derived.
5. How close was your guess?

# Explore

Our world is full of connections—between people, places, and events. In this section of the website, you will find activities that uncover some important connections—in aeronautical science, geology, electrical engineering, the physics of simple machines, and other laboratory sciences —between *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* and our world.

## Aeronautical Science



### The Aerodynamics of Bird Flight

Because she is a bit less frightened the second time she agrees to fly on Jeremy's back, Mrs. Frisby has the presence of mind to think about just how her new friend gets into the air and stays there: "Once again she [feels] the surge of power as the crow's wings beat down against the air; this time it [lasts] longer for they [are] going higher than before. Then the beating [becomes] gentler as they [level] off. . . . A current of warm air, rising from the woods, [is] carrying them along" (47-48). Mrs. Frisby is clearly mystified by this

unexpected experience. Have you ever stopped to think about how birds fly? What do they have that the other animal groups on our planet don't? How has bird watching helped us humans conquer the skies? Let's find out!

### Activities

- [Study how birds' anatomy helps them overcome the pull of gravity.](#)
- [Watch this video to see how a bird's skeleton enables flight motion.](#)
- [Learn why migratory birds fly in echelons](#), or special flight formations, [to conserve energy.](#)
- [Track the ways in which humans have studied and attempted to imitate bird flight throughout history.](#)
- Physicists today continue to use what we have learned from birds as they study the way objects move through air. Consider how the study of [aerodynamics](#) has [helped humans fly through the sky and all the way to outer space!](#)

Now you know more about how birds fly and what we humans have achieved thanks to some curious bird watching. Think about all we have learned—and could learn in the future—just from the scientific study of animals. What other advancements have we made thanks to our observations of animal behavior and adaptations? What are some other ways you can imagine humans could benefit from imitating animals in the future?

## Geology

### The Wonder and Mystery of Caves

Nicodemus explains to Mrs. Frisby that the rats selected their home underneath the Fitzgibbons' rosebush because, based on their extensive research in the library of the Boniface Estate, they wanted their "new home" to "be underground, preferably, if [they] could find it, a cave" (161-62). The rats were, of course, able to transform their cave into a surprisingly comfortable, well-lit home with plenty of storage and room to grow. Interestingly, some of the earliest human civilizations also began in caves, which are widespread across our planet. Researchers over the last half century have solved many mysteries about how caves are formed and what they have to teach us about prehistoric human history. Take a look!

### Activities

- [Learn how natural caves are formed](#) and [watch this video animation to see cave formation in action](#).
- [Compare the various types of caves by taking this virtual tour](#).
- [Distinguish speleology and spelunking](#). What types of tools and training do you think are needed for each activity?
- Research what caves can teach us about [prehistoric human life](#), the development of [graphic communication](#), and [the Earth's climate thousands of years ago](#).
- [Consider why scientists argue that caves are important and should be preserved](#). In what way(s) are caves at risk?
- [Follow some kids your age as they explore the caves](#) in the [Carlsbad Caverns National Park](#).
- Ask a parent (or other trusted adult) to help you [find a cave tour near you](#), so you can experience the wonder of being underground yourself!

What most surprises you about cave formation and the many roles caves have played throughout human history? Why?

## Electrical Engineering

### Harnessing the Power of Electricity

The more Mrs. Frisby explores the rats' home, the more amazed she is by the way they have used electricity to make their lives more comfortable and enjoyable. Justin tells her: "We've had electricity for . . . years now" (76). With the electricity they borrow from the Fitzgibbons, the rats power strands of holiday lights to illuminate dark, underground spaces and a radio for hearing music and the news (77, 99). In our own homes, we too can simply flip a switch to turn on the lights, heat a room, or run the dishwasher. It's easy to take these conveniences for granted. Have you ever wondered how we capture energy from electricity and use it to power our electrical appliances and devices?



## Activities

- [Watch this video to learn the history of humans' efforts to harness the power of electricity.](#) How has human life changed since our ancestors learned to use electricity?
- [Learn what electricity is and how it works on an atomic level.](#) What are the different types of electricity? How are they used?
- [Find out how power plants generate electricity and get it to your home and other places around town.](#)
- [Trace the path of electricity through series and parallel circuits.](#) Which type of circuits would you most likely find throughout your home? [What about in holiday lights](#) like the ones the rats use?
- Most of the electricity we use today comes from [nonrenewable resources](#). Consider the [renewable energy options](#) scientists are exploring for generating electricity in the future.
- Try out these safe and simple electricity experiments: [Build-your-own electroscope](#) to detect electrical charges in everyday objects or [light a lightbulb with static electricity from your own body](#).



What do you think your life would be like if you had no access to electricity? Based on what you have learned, in what ways do you see electricity helping advance human civilization in the future?

## Physics

### Simple Machines

Another of the human advancements the rats have mastered is the use of simple machines to make their work faster and easier. Let's find out more about what simple machines can do for us. What are they? How do they work? What would life be like without them?

### Activities

- [Identify the six simple machines and how they are used.](#)

- [Watch this video to learn how simple machines help make work easier.](#) What is the difference between simple and compound machines?
- [Play this online game](#) to see how well you can identify and use simple machines at work in the everyday world.
- [Meet Rube Goldberg](#), an engineer turned cartoonist who loved to dream up and draw complicated contraptions, using simple and compound machines, to accomplish everyday tasks.
- Today, students around the world have taken Goldberg's lead. Watch kids just like you, using their knowledge of simple machines to design and test their own [Rube Goldberg contraptions](#). What simple machines do you see incorporated into the students' various designs?
- [Follow these online instructions to put your knowledge of simple machines to work by designing your own Rube Goldberg contraption at home.](#)

As you read *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, what simple or compound machines do you see the rats using? Do you see any similar energy-saving mechanisms at work in your own home or school? How would your day-to-day life be different without these machines?

## Experimental Science

### Mastering the Scientific Method

While the rats and mice are held captive in the NIMH laboratory, they observe and participate in a number of science experiments designed to test the ways in which rodents can be taught to solve puzzles more quickly. Although they don't know it at the time, the rats and mice are helping Dr. Schultz, George, and Julie carry out the scientific method (118-19). What exactly is the scientific method? How is it used to conduct experiments? Why?

### Activities

- [Learn how and why scientists follow the scientific method when conducting experiments.](#)
- [Watch this video to see the scientific method in action!](#)
- Put your knowledge of the scientific method to the test using [this index of science experiments you can try out at home](#). Be sure to check out the projects on [aerodynamics](#) and [electricity](#).
- If you have a science fair project coming up in the near future, [bookmark this guide to conducting prize-winning science fair projects using the scientific method](#).

Based on what you have learned, what do you see as the benefits of using the scientific method for research? In what ways do you think using the scientific method might make research more difficult?

# Create

An important part of learning is having the chance to produce something of your own. Here you will find engaging projects that connect with the novel and that allow your creative abilities to shine.

## **Let Your Feelings Take Flight**

The first time Mrs. Frisby hops on Jeremy's back, she barely has time to think about what she is doing before she is flying high in the air. "She [grips] the feathers on his back, [feels] the beat of his powerful black wings, [feels] a dizzying upward surge, and [shuts] her eyes tight" because she can't bear to look down (25). The next time, though, Mrs. Frisby feels a little braver. As they soar over the countryside, she can look "off to the right, and a bit behind them, she [sees] a gray-brown square the size of a postage stamp. She [realizes] with a gasp that it [is] the garden patch" where she and her family live (48). Off to her left, she even sees the river, which from that height, "[looks] like a wide, fearsome snake, blue-green in color, coiling through the woods" (48). Because Mrs. Frisby never expected to see the world from this perspective, her mind is filled with new ideas and feelings that she cannot quite understand.

Writing a poem, or even lyrics to a song, can sometimes help us put difficult feelings into words. Think of a time when you've experienced intense feelings. Were you frightened but curious, like Mrs. Frisby? Joyful? Nervous? Eager? Sad? Something else? On a scratch sheet of paper, brainstorm some ideas about what happened to you and how it made you feel. Note any images, textures, sounds, sensations, or colors that come to mind as well.

Then take a break and [explore former Children's Poet Laureate Kenn Nesbitt's Web site](#) to read sample poems, play poetry games, look at a rhyming dictionary, and study some free poetry lessons. When you're feeling inspired, return to your brainstorming ideas and try to write your own short poem or song. For an added challenge, use rhyming couplets (two-line pairs with rhyming words at the end, like "bees" and "knees" or "share" and "care") and choose your words carefully. Make each one as packed with meaning as possible!

If you're an artist who prefers to speak through your instrument, paintbrushes, pencils, collage, clay, interpretive dance, or some other artistic medium, by all means, pick up your preferred tools instead! Find a creative way to set your emotions to music or canvas; make the notes and colors match the mood of your experience.

## **Brighten Your Space with Stained Glass**

Mrs. Frisby is amazed by how cleverly the rats have designed and decorated their home under the rosebush, particularly when she reaches the hallway: "The light [comes] from the walls, where every foot or so on both sides a tiny light bulb [has] been recessed and the hole in which it [stands], like a small window, [has] been covered with a square of colored glass—blue, green, or yellow. The effect [is] that of stained glass windows in sunlight" (76). Although they are completely underground, they are surrounded by light and color. Clearly, the rats have learned something about the joy that creating and appreciating art can bring.

Take some time to learn more about stained glass art. [How is stained glass made?](#) [What gives stained glass its color?](#) [When was stained glass art first made and why?](#) The answers to these questions should give you lots of ideas



about how to start your own stained glass making project!

Keeping in mind what you have learned about stained glass design, follow these online instructions to create your own stained glass art using [tissue paper](#), [aluminum foil](#), [pasta noodles](#), or [cookie dough](#). (Remember to get help from a trusted adult when you tackle this last one! Never operate kitchen appliances without permission.)

When you are finished with your stained glass project, reflect on

your creative experience. What was it like to combine colors and shapes in this way? Which parts of the project were the most fun for you? Which parts were the most difficult? What do you like best about the art you created? Why do you think stained glass became such a popular way to decorate special spaces? If you repeat this project in the future, what will you do differently? Why?

## Channel Your Inner Movie Critic

Several years after it was published, the novel *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* was adapted into an animated film called *The Secret of NIMH*. As we all know, sometimes when a book gets turned into a movie, it's great! Sometimes, though, the movie just doesn't do the book justice. Once you have finished reading *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, you will be well prepared to watch the film adaptation and tell other viewers what they can expect. You can write a movie review, just like a professional movie critic!

First, ask a trusted adult to help you rent the film *The Secret of NIMH* online or borrow it from a local library. As you watch the film, keep a pen and paper handy, so you can take notes. Here are some aspects to consider:

- What do you think of the way the filmmakers have envisioned the characters and setting?
- Have any important scenes been added, changed, or deleted?
- Does the addition of a musical score, in the film, affect your response to the story in any way? If so, how?
- Do you think the film is true to the story told in the book?
- Which do you like better, the book or the film? Why?

After you have watched *The Secret of NIMH* and taken some notes, it's time to [do some brainstorming about the key similarities and differences between the book and the film](#). Draw a Venn diagram (pages 21 and 22) to help you organize your ideas and help you decide which points of comparison will be the most interesting and useful to your readers.

Lastly, [follow these online guidelines](#) to organize your best ideas into a short and entertaining movie review. When you are finished writing, consider asking a friend or family member to video you delivering your review just like [real-life movie critics do on television](#). Don't forget to give the film a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" at the end!

## **Build a Brain Teaser**

Those who have escaped from NIMH now face a challenge they never had before: Finding ways to keep their minds active and sharp. As a result, the rats and Mr. Ages have become voracious readers who devour any and all books they find. In fact, they are probably a lot like you in that respect! They have also become keen thinkers, tinkers, and puzzle solvers. No wonder the wise old owl sends Mrs. Frisby to the rats for help moving her house!

One of the best ways to keep our own minds active (other than reading, of course) is to make and solve puzzles. Why not try your hand at building a crossword puzzle? Using the *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* vocabulary words and definitions (see page 6) you have been studying, [follow these step-by-step instructions to draw your crossword puzzle by hand](#) or [use this online puzzle generator](#) to make a printable crossword. This activity will help you make visual connections between the words and their definitions so you will remember the vocabulary you have studied for years to come.

Don't forget to make some copies and ask a few friends and/or family members to try out your crossword puzzle! Get their feedback on how well the puzzle works. Are the clues clear but challenging? Do the numbers and spaces match up properly with the clues and correct answers? Consider ways you could make your crossword puzzle even better. Maybe your hard work will even inspire someone to make a new crossword challenge for you to solve!

## **Reflect & Connect Prompts**

In Duke TIP's online Book Club, the "Reflect & Connect" prompts provide an opportunity for students to share their ideas about the book with other Duke TIP students. You may choose to record your responses to these questions in your Reading Journal, or you can use them to talk about the book with friends or classmates who have also read it.

### **Brains over Brawn**

When Mrs. Frisby meets Jeremy, the young crow, she is surprised by his silly and reckless behavior, especially considering Dragon the cat is prowling nearby! Then Mrs. Frisby "recall[s] what her husband used to say: The size of the brain is no measure of its capacity" (24). Although she is much smaller, Mrs. Frisby clearly has more brain power than her new friend. She calmly quiets Jeremy and nimbly frees him from the tangled string just in time for them both to escape the cat's pounce.

Have you ever observed a person or creature outsmart a much bigger problem or foe? Choose an example from a real-world experience, nature video, book, magazine article, or similar source. Describe the situation and those involved. What happened in the end? In what way(s) were you surprised by what you observed? What did you learn?

## **In Search of the Right Key**

In the first few chapters of the book, as Mrs. Frisby struggles to find a way to help poor Timothy, she begins to feel more and more alone. If only her husband were still alive and could help her! Somehow, Mr. Frisby always had a useful bit of wisdom to soothe his wife's worries and help her focus on finding a solution. Then Mrs. Frisby "remember[s] something" else he "used to say: All doors are hard to unlock until you have the key" (32).

What do you think Mr. Frisby meant by this? Has this saying ever proven true in your own life? How so? Tell us about a time you have faced a problem that seemed impossible to overcome. What was that experience like for you? What motivated you to keep looking for the right "key" to solving your problem?

## **Facing Our Fears**

Jeremy wants to thank Mrs. Frisby for rescuing him from the cat, so he offers to fly her "about a mile from" home to "a very large beech tree, the biggest in the whole forest" to see whether "the oldest animal in the woods—some say in the world"—can help her save Timothy (42). If she agrees, Mrs. Frisby must leave her children alone, fly on the crow's back "deep into a dark and unknown forest," and face one of the forest's most dangerous predators (43). Even though she is scared she may not survive the trip, Mrs. Frisby decides to go with Jeremy anyway.

Have you ever had an experience like Mrs. Frisby's, where you had to set your fears aside, do what needed to be done, and hope everything would turn out alright in the end? What happened? What was that experience like for you? In what way(s) can our fears be helpful (or harmful) to us?

## **Wise Beyond His Years**

In the chapter titled "In the Rosebush," Timothy surprises his mother when he says, "I have to think about [Moving Day]. . . . [b]ecause if it comes too soon, I don't know if I can go. . . . But I'm not scared. I was afraid you might be, or that you might think I was. That's really what I wanted to tell you. I'm just going to wait and see what happens. So you shouldn't worry about it, either" (63-64). In that moment, "Mrs. Frisby realize[s] that [Timothy] has somehow switched their positions. He ha[s] seen the danger he [is] in. . . . And yet here he [is]—reassuring her" (64). Even though Mrs. Frisby sees it as her job to comfort and calm her son, Timothy, who is still very much a child, reaches out to comfort and calm his mother.

What do you make of this parent-child role reversal? Have you ever experienced or observed a situation like this before? What was that like? What do you think leads a kid to react so maturely and wisely in a crisis situation like the one Timothy and Mrs. Frisby are facing?

## **Our Animal Friends**

As you have already noticed, author Robert C. O'Brien has given the animal characters in *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* human-like qualities, feelings, and behaviors. This is a literary technique called anthropomorphism.

What are some reasons authors or filmmakers might prefer to tell a story through the eyes of animals, rather than humans? Do animal characters and/or storylines affect an audience differently than human characters? What is

another of your favorite books or films where animal characters are anthropomorphized? How does the use of anthropomorphism shape your reaction to this favorite book or film?

## **Character Connections**

**Spoiler Alert: If you haven't finished the book, stop reading here and come back later!**

With which character in *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* do you connect most strongly? Why? How do your feelings about this character affect your overall reaction to the story? To support your answer, be sure to link details or events from the novel with your own experience.

## **All for One and One for All**

**Spoiler Alert: If you haven't finished the book, stop reading here and come back later!**

About two-thirds of the way through the book, in the chapter titled "The Main Hall," Mrs. Frisby finally sees just how serious the rats are about carrying out their relocation "Plan." Justin shows her all of the equipment the rats have been building and the supplies they have been stockpiling. To Mrs. Frisby, "the steady procession of rats" marching in and out of the storeroom with sacks of grain "[look] . . . like very large ants endlessly toiling on an anthill" (157). Justin seems to read the look on her face. He points out, "If the ants can do it, Nicodemus says, if the bees can do it, so can we" (157).

Obviously, cooperating for the good of the group is not a natural behavior for rats. The rats who have escaped from NIMH, however, are unusually well educated and are choosing to adopt behaviors they admire in other species. The rats believe the "all for one and one for all" mentality they have observed in ants and bees will help the rat colony stop stealing from humans and survive on their own. Other than bees and ants, what is another animal species you know of that thrives on group cooperation? How so? In what way(s) could the species you've mentioned be an example for the rats (and us humans!) about how to get along and help one another build a better life?

## **Do-It-Yourself Fan Fiction**

Many readers love to write fan fiction, or follow-up stories, based on their favorite characters from books or film. This is a fun way to continue a storyline and imagine what characters would do, say, and think. If you were in charge of writing a story to follow *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, what would happen next? Would you focus on the rats' venture in Thorn Valley, Mrs. Frisby's family, or something else? Where would you, as a reader, most like to follow these characters within the world O'Brien has created? Why? Tell us all about it here! (By the way, if you have already read the sequel written by O'Brien's daughter Jane Leslie Conly, please be careful not to spoil it for your fellow readers here!)

# Keep Reading

## A few thoughts on books and reading...

"When I have a little money, I buy books; and if I have any left, I buy food and clothes."—Erasmus

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."—Dr. Seuss

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read."—Groucho Marx



## What's next?

We hope that you enjoyed reading *Mrs. Frisby and Rats of NIMH*, by Robert C. O'Brien. Check your email for information about our next book club selection. In the meantime, if you are looking for a new best friend—and aren't inside a dog—here are some books you might enjoy. Don't forget to use the tips from "Writing While You Read" (see pages 17 and 18) to deepen your enjoyment and understanding of these books too.

- *Rasco and the Rats of NIMH*, by Jane Leslie Conly
- *All Four Stars*, by Tara Dairman
- *The Stars of Summer*, by Tara Dairman (sequel to *All Four Stars*)
- *The Tell-Tale Start* and other books in "The Misadventures of Edgar & Allan Poe" series by Gordon McAlpine
- *Masterminds*, by Gordon Korman
- *My Near-Death Adventures*, by Alison DeCamp
- *The Scavengers*, by Michael Perry
- *A Single Shard*, by Linda Sue Park
- *The Island of Dr. Libris*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *The Lost Kingdom*, by Matthew J. Kirby
- *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*, by Kate DiCamillo
- *The House of Power*, by Patrick Carman
- *Rivers of Fire*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Dark Planet*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster
- *Navigating Early*, by Clare Vanderpool
- *The Apothecary*, by Maile Meloy
- *The Apprentices*, by Maile Meloy (sequel to *The Apothecary*)
- *The City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The People of Sparks*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Prophet of Yonwood*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Diamond of Darkhold*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, by Trenton Lee Stewart
- *Chasing Vermeer*, by Blue Balliett
- *The Lightning Thief*, by Rick Riordan
- *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson
- *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, by Brian Selznick





## Writing While You Read

Have you ever read every word on a page, and turned every page, but when you finished reading, you couldn't remember anything that you had read? If so, you're not alone! Reading can be relaxing, but sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that reading is passive, when it should be active. This doesn't mean you need to run while reading – that might not be a good idea. Writing as you read, however, makes reading active. This process involves some effort, but the payoff for that effort is a deeper understanding and greater enjoyment of the books that you read.

Two strategies for being an active reader are keeping a reading journal and annotating your books.

### How do I keep a reading journal?

Below are some suggestions of things that you might write in your reading journal. Experiment with them. You may find that one strategy works really well for you, while others don't work at all. There's really not a right or wrong way to keep a reading journal, as long as you use it as a place to explore your thoughts, reactions, and questions as you read.

#### What Do I Write?

**Write a brief summary**, in your own words, at the end of each chapter or section. Include the main ideas or concepts of the chapter, major events in the plot, and any new information that you learn in the chapter.

**Do you meet a new character?** If so, what is the character like? How do you know? What are the reasons behind what that character says and does? How is the character like other characters in the book? How is the character different? Does this new character remind you of characters you've read about in other books?

**Does the setting change?** If so, how does the new setting compare and contrast with the previous one? Why does the setting change?

**Create your own title** for the chapter. If the book includes chapter titles, you might write about why the author has chosen that particular title for the chapter. How does it relate to the main ideas or concepts, major events, and character action in the chapter?

**Respond to the chapter.** What is the most interesting thing in the chapter? What did you learn that you didn't know before? Do you agree or disagree with the choices the author is making about plot and character? Why or why not? What do you think is going to happen next? How can you connect what is happening in the book to other things you've read? To other things you know? To your own experience?

**Identify words that you don't know.** Some of these words may just be new to you; others may be jargon, terminology that is used in a particular field or academic discipline. Look these words up in a dictionary, write down their definitions in your notebook, and be sure you understand their meanings and how the author is using them. Often these words are some of the most important in the reading.

**Make note of passages** where you are confused and/or have questions, and be sure to include a page number. Once you finish the chapter, you can return to the passages. Perhaps further reading clarified the confusion. If not, you know exactly which points in the text to further research or to ask questions about.

**Write down striking or unusual use of language.** Often writers use particular words, expressions, or sentences in ways that we wouldn't have thought to use them, and the effect can really jump off the page at us. If you come across a passage that seems really cool to you, write it down in your reading journal.



Throughout the online book club activities, you will find activities that are specifically labeled "Reading Journal." When you see that label, read the writing prompt, and respond to it in your reading journal. These prompts will usually ask you to write about a personal connection to what you've been reading. For example, a journal prompt might ask you to write about a time when you found yourself in a situation that is similar to a situation of one of the characters in the book.

### To Write or To Type, That is the Question!

Your reading journal doesn't have to be a hard-copy, hand-written one, but there are some advantages to using an old-fashioned journal:

- The physical act of writing promotes a stronger memory for new words, phrases, and strategies you will be learning
- The hard copy notebook can evolve into a collage, a scrapbook, even a work of art that represents your creative, messy, overflowing mind!

How and where you keep a reading journal is much less important than actually doing it! So find an old notebook that may be buried in your desk, ask mom or dad if you can buy an inexpensive composition book, or create a new folder on your home computer and get started!!



## How do I annotate a book?

As the word suggests, annotating a book involves making notes or other types of marks that help you focus on particular words or passages that seem important, are often repeated, relate to other things you've read, or simply interest you as a reader. An active reader annotates a text by doing any or all of the following:

#### UNDERLINING

Specific words that convey significant events or elements of the story's characters, plot or theme

#### VERTICAL LINE ALONG THE MARGIN

This helps the reader quickly find an important passage underlined, or to highlight a paragraph or other section too long to underline.

#### \* ASTERISK/STAR/DOODLE ☆

Placed in the margin, this device is reserved for the most important, special ideas, events or elements of the book. There would be no more than a dozen of these in the entire book; by flipping through, one could easily find once again the most significant passages in the text.

#### 4. NUMBERS

Placing numbers in the margin can help count a set of related points or ideas the author is listing.

#### P.#32 PAGE NUMBERS

Often indicated by "p. #" or "Cf. #" next to the number, this indicates an idea or element is connected to another on different page of the book, and should be considered together.

#### CIRCLES

These serve the same function as underlining key words or phrases, but may be reserved for the BIGGEST ideas or facts in the book.

Of course, all of these strategies involve marking in the book. So if you're planning on annotating your book, we recommend that you have your own copy – librarians take a very dim view of writing in books that belong to the media center/library!



## Names, Places, & Faces...Oh, My!

### Keeping Track with a Character Grid

When reading a new book, it can be helpful to keep track of the characters you meet and what you think about them. This Character Grid is one way to do just that!

Characters in books (or movies!) are often very like people you meet every day in real life. You may notice the way a character dresses, talks, thinks, behaves, or makes new friends. As you record your ongoing thoughts here, remember that some characters will change and grow depending on what happens to them—or whom they meet—as the story progresses. These are called **dynamic** characters. On the other hand, some characters stay the same no matter what happens to them. These are called **static** characters. Whether a character is willing to change and grow can affect the kind of person he or she turns out to be in the end, and it can also influence how we, as readers, feel about that character.

For example, Marlin, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, starts out as an overprotective dad who doesn't believe his son Nemo should try new things because he might get hurt. As the movie progresses, though, Marlin makes new friends, like Crush and Dory, who help him learn to guide and encourage his son without keeping him from experiencing the fun life has to offer. By the end of the movie, Marlin has changed his way of thinking about how to be a "good" dad. This not only makes him a dynamic character but also makes us like him better and want him to succeed as a parent. (If Marlin had not changed his ways, we might have ended up being frustrated by him.)

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Tuck this Character Grid into your book or Reading Journal. Then, each time you meet a new character in the book, take a moment to write down his or her name on the grid and answer the "As You Are Reading" questions. (If you run out of writing room, feel free to create your own grid or answer these questions in your Reading Journal!)
2. Once you have finished the book, go back through your grid and answer the "After You Have Finished the Book" questions. As a way of wrapping up, consider: With which character(s) did you connect most strongly? What does this tell you about yourself?

Character's Name	As You Are Reading...		After You Have Finished the Book...	
	Where/When do you meet this character?	Describe this character's appearance and behavior.	What stands out to you about this character's name, behavior, or choices?	Why is this character important to the story overall?
			Is this character <b>static</b> or <b>dynamic</b> ? What evidence from the book tells you so?	

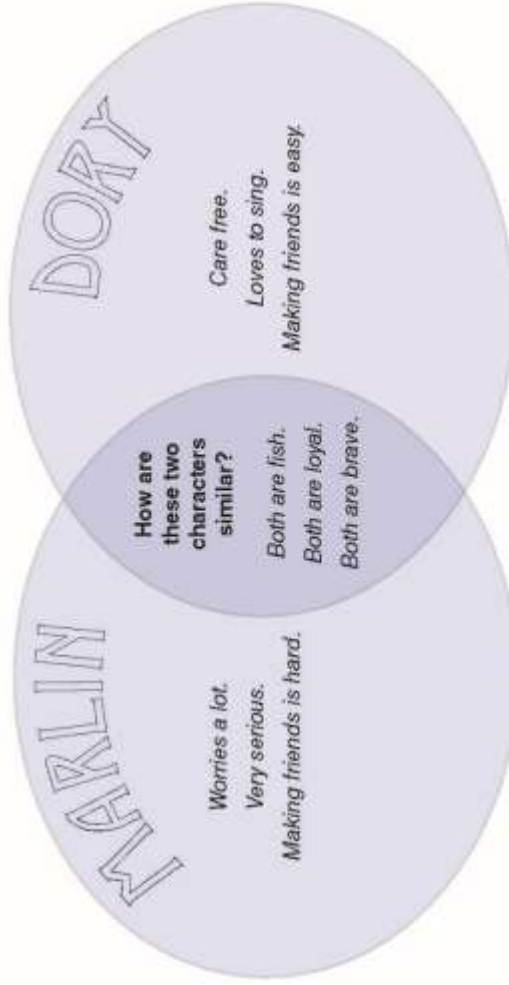


## Finding Common Ground

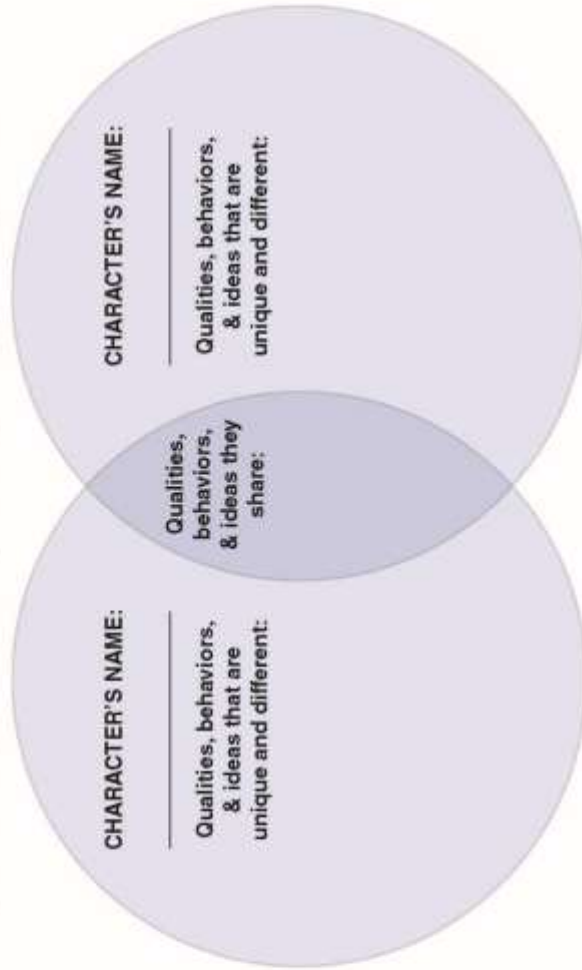
### Side-By-Side Comparison with a Venn Diagram

Creating a Venn Diagram can help you visualize and make sense of the similarities and differences between two or more things. For example, as you are reading a book, you could use a Venn Diagram to compare key characters, places, or events.

A basic Venn Diagram is made up of two, partially overlapping circles. Let's say you wanted to compare two characters. In the outer part of each circle, you would write one character's name and list the qualities, behaviors, and ideas that make him or her unique and different. In the space where the circles overlap, write down characteristics the characters share. If we were comparing Marlin and Dory, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, here is how our Venn Diagram might look. (If you've seen this movie, try adding some observations of your own!):



Now you are ready to draw your own Venn Diagram in your Reading Journal! To get started, try something like this:



If you want to compare more than two characters, places, or events, simply add additional circles to your Venn Diagram. Be creative! Just pay attention to the places where your circles overlap and look for similarities there. Here are some other possibilities:

