

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Bunnicula: A Rabbit-Tale of Mystery by Deborah Howe

Book Information

Deborah Howe, Bunnicula: A Rabbit-Tale of Mystery
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Chester, the Monroe family's cat, resorts to hilarious antics to alert his owners and Harold, their dog, that the newly adopted bunny may actually be a vegetable vampire. The coauthor is James Howe.

Award: NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; State Award; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

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Main Characters

Bunnicula the quiet pet rabbit of the Monroe family, who sleeps all day and sucks the juice out of vegetables at night

Chester the cat who first suspects that Bunnicula is a vampire

Harold the friendly dog who narrates the story and switches his allegiance from Chester to Bunnicula by the end of the story

Mr. Monroe the father of the Monroe family; he teaches at a university

Mrs. Monroe the lawyer mother of the Monroe family; she frequently misinterprets what the animals try to communicate to her

Pete Monroe the slightly selfish son of the Monroe family, who frequently starts fights with his brother; Harold does not like him because he does not share well

Toby Monroe the kind son of the Monroe family, who found Bunnicula at the movie theater; he frequently shares his snacks with Harold

Vocabulary

aghast shocked

blight disease

commotion a lot of activity and noise

immobile not able to move

murmur to speak softly

snooze nap

Synopsis

Supposedly written by Harold the dog, *Bunnicula* begins with the Monroe family bringing home a new pet bunny. After arguing over what to name the bunny, the family settles on Bunnicula because they found the rabbit at a theater during a showing of the movie *Dracula*.

The next morning the family cat, Chester, who reads a lot and has an active imagination, tells Harold that he thinks there is something strange about the bunny.

For the next few days, Chester watches Bunnicula. When Chester tells Harold that Bunnicula can leave his locked cage, Harold is skeptical. While the two are discussing Bunnicula, the Monroes discover a white tomato in the refrigerator. When Mrs. Monroe slices the tomato, they discover that it is dry. They conclude the tomato has gone bad, but Chester thinks he sees fang marks on the tomato. He decides to reread a book called *The Mark of the Vampire*. He arranges to meet Harold later.

That night Harold almost misses the meeting because he is in Toby's room begging for food. When he arrives, Chester shows him in the book what Bunnicula has in common with vampires. Harold is still somewhat skeptical, but Chester is making a convincing argument when the two notice that Bunnicula is gone from his cage. They go into the kitchen and discover a white zucchini on the floor.

The following morning several white vegetables around the kitchen baffle the Monroes. Chester puts

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a towel on like a cape and pantomimes being a vampire, but the Monroes just think he is cold and make him wear his kitty sweater.

That night Harold awakens to find Chester has covered the house in garlic to immobilize Bunnacula. The garlic keeps Bunnacula in his cage, but Mrs. Monroe is enraged that Chester has "played" with her garlic. She removes the garlic and gives Chester a much-hated bath.

Chester misunderstands the directions in the vampire book that instruct him to drive a stake into a vampire to destroy it. He then pounds Bunnacula with a sirloin steak. Mrs. Monroe throws Chester outside and gives the steak to Harold. Incensed, Chester stops speaking to Harold. Harold, seeking companionship, strikes up a friendship with the silent but cuddly Bunnacula.

A few days later Harold notices that Bunnacula seems ill. He realizes that Bunnacula is being starved by Chester and determines to save Bunnacula. He tries to get Bunnacula to a salad, but Chester attacks Bunnacula. The Monroes intervene and realize that Bunnacula is sick. They decide to take all the pets to the vet in the morning.

At the vet's Chester is diagnosed as suffering from sibling rivalry. He is taken to a pet psychiatrist. Bunnacula is put on a diet of carrot juice, which he enjoys so much the Monroes keep him on it, and vegetables stop turning white.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

By the end of the story, how does Harold feel about Chester's theories about Bunnacula?

When Chester first tells Harold he thinks something is wrong with Bunnacula, Harold thinks that Chester's imagination might be getting the better of him. By the end of the story Harold thinks there may be some truth to Chester's idea that Bunnacula is sucking the juice out of vegetables, but he is no longer worried about what Bunnacula might do. Instead, Harold thinks that Chester is too obsessed with his theories to realize that Bunnacula is not really a threat. At this point, Harold seems frustrated and upset that Chester is willing to harm Bunnacula just because Chester thinks Bunnacula is a vampire.

Literary Analysis

How are the events in this book affected by Chester's character?

Not only does Chester have a very suspicious nature, he also believes he knows everything. He enjoys being in control of others, as is shown by his domination over Harold and his insistence on manipulating Bunnacula. These three traits serve as a catalyst for most of the events in this story. It is Chester's distrustful nature that causes him to investigate Bunnacula by watching him and researching his behavior. It is his need to believe that he is always right that makes him insist that Bunnacula is a threat even though he is obviously interested only in vegetables. His desire to control others causes him to manipulate Harold into helping attack Bunnacula and then inspires him to attempt starving Bunnacula to death.

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Inferential Comprehension

What clues does the reader have that Mrs. Monroe does not understand her pets?

Mrs. Monroe never seems to interpret properly anything the pets are telling her. She says Chester does not want Bunnicula's milk after Chester waits anxiously for her to give it to him. She is unaware that Chester hates to be kissed on the nose and called "kitty-cat." She thinks Chester is cold and wants his kitty sweater when he is trying to tell her about Bunnicula. She is also unaware that Harold was cooperating with Chester when Chester attacked Bunnicula with the steak.

Constructing Meaning

Chester has many ideas about Bunnicula. Which of these ideas are opinions, and which are facts?

It is Chester's opinion that Bunnicula is a threat to the entire family, his way of life is evil, and it is necessary to kill him. It seems to be fact, however, that Bunnicula does not like garlic, never awakens during the day, sucks the juices out of vegetables, and is not stopped by locked doors.

Teachable Skills

Understanding the Author's Craft Although his suspicions about Bunnicula turn out to be true, Chester is portrayed as a paranoid cat who overreacts to every situation. Have the students pick out places in the book where Chester's desire to reveal Bunnicula's identity is described in a way that makes him look ridiculous. Have them discuss these passages in small groups or in a classroom discussion.

Comparing and Contrasting Chester makes a point of noticing all the ways that Bunnicula is like the vampires he has read about in books, but there are also many significant ways in which Bunnicula is different. Have the students research vampires and make a chart showing both the similarities and the differences between Bunnicula and a vampire like Dracula.

Recognizing Feelings At the end of this story,

Chester is sent to a pet psychiatrist to help him adjust to living with Bunnicula. Have the students pair up and choose one of the pets as their patient. Then have them create a scene in which one student plays a pet and another plays the psychiatrist. Have the students consider that each pet probably has different issues that are troubling it before they prepare their scenes.

Responding to Literature Harold does not take Chester seriously because he thinks Chester's imagination is getting the better of him. Have the students write about a time when they had a worry that was dismissed by someone because their concerns were attributed to an overactive imagination. Have them consider in their paper whether they now believe it was their imagination or still think their concerns were based on fact.