

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Stuart Little

by
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Book Information

E.B. White, Stuart Little
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Stuart, an inventive and debonair mouse, has a great adventure.

Topics: Animals, Mice; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5

Main Characters

Dr. Carey a skillful dentist whom Stuart befriends in Central Park

George Stuart's brother, who is easily distracted from projects

Harriet Ames a girl whom Stuart meets while on his adventure to find Margalo

Margalo a bird whom Stuart grows to love while she visits at the Little home

Mr. Little Stuart's father, who has never traveled far from home and likes to hear of Stuart's adventures

Mrs. Little Stuart's kind mother, who is very worried about Stuart as well as proud of his accomplishments

Snowbell the Littles' cat that causes trouble for Stuart and Margalo

Stuart Little a mouse born into a human family, who is adventuresome and daring

Vocabulary

inkwell a container (as in a school desk) for ink
rank luxuriantly or excessively vigorous in growth
scrapping fighting
swindled to have obtained money or property by fraud or deceit

Synopsis

Stuart Little is a mouse born into the human family of Mr. and Mrs. Little. Stuart is loved and respected by all who know him, except for the family cat, Snowbell. Although Stuart encounters his share of trouble due to his mouselike appearance and size, he does enjoy life and finds many adventures to fill his time.

Stuart's family consists of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Little, and his brother, George. His parents love him and are proud of the help that he can offer by fitting into small spaces, such as venturing down a drain to retrieve a ring. He conquers obstacles in order to survive in a world that is meant for big people.

He finds a true friend when a sick bird, Margalo, comes to stay with the Little family. She is quite content to stay until she is sent a note warning her of impending danger. Snowbell and a friend of his have a plan for the friend to eat Margalo. She flies away to escape the danger, leaving Stuart with a broken heart.

Stuart decides to set out after Margalo. With the help of his friend, Dr. Carey, who lends him a car, Stuart motors through the countryside in search of his friend. Along the way he encounters many adventures, including substituting as a teacher for a day and meeting a girl his size during an ill-fated date. Stuart continues his search for Margalo as the story ends, and he is very hopeful that his quest will be successful.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

Why do you think Mr. and Mrs. Little felt such concern over the mousehole in the pantry?

Mr. Little felt certain that Stuart would one day venture into the hole. This does seem likely since Stuart was such an inquisitive and adventuresome mouse. His parents were worried that once inside the mousehole, Stuart would become lost or stuck, unable to make his way back into the pantry. They might have also feared that the passage would lead outside and to possible danger, or that Stuart could encounter some unfriendly mice.

Literary Analysis

Do you think Stuart will ever find Margalo? Why?

This is obviously an opinion question, but there are clues in the story that hint at Stuart's success in his quest to find Margalo. The mood at the end of the story is very hopeful, and Stuart feels that he is "headed in the right direction." Even if he doesn't find her on his journey and returns home, it seems likely they will meet again. Margalo will probably stop at the Little home during her next migration.

Inferential Comprehension

Why did Snowbell plan to allow his friend, the Angora, to attack and kill Margalo? Why didn't Snowbell do it himself? Why didn't he also plan to get rid of Stuart at the same time?

Snowbell disliked both Stuart and Margalo, but because he was a proper pet, he couldn't kill others that were also considered a part of the family. He knew that he would lose his home if he did. He probably wouldn't have allowed the Angora to harm Stuart either because he knew how upset the Littles would have been. However, Margalo was only a guest, not a permanent member of the family, so Snowbell was happy to allow the Angora to eat her. He knew he would not be blamed himself for her death.

Constructing Meaning

Do you think Mr. and Mrs. Little would have set out to find Stuart as he did to find Margalo?

This is an opinion question, but students should offer support for their answers. Certainly the Littles would do everything possible to find their son. However, Stuart left no word about where he was going, so it is unlikely his parents would know where he was headed. They did not know Stuart's friend, Dr. Carey, so they could not know that he might have information that would help them. They would probably wait at home and leave the search to professionals (i.e. the police and detectives).

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Stuart and his family lived in New York City. After Margalo disappeared, Stuart traveled north in his quest to find her. Make a map of Stuart's journey the way you imagine it progressed. Indicate places on the map where important events happened (Stuart teaching school, meeting Harriet, talking to the telephone repairman, etc.). Imagine events that could have occurred after the story's end and include them as well.

Comparing and Contrasting In this story, Stuart seems to be accepted by other people in spite of his mouselike appearance and small size. Read another book about "little people"--either *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton or *The Indian in the Cupboard* by Lynne Reid-Banks. Discover how "normal" people react to the "little people" in these books. Compare character reactions in them to the interactions of the characters in *Stuart Little*.

Recognizing Details Because of Stuart's small size, many things in his home had to be modified to fit him. He also used everyday household objects in unusual ways. For example, he used paper clips as ice skates and cardboard ice-cream spoons as canoe paddles. Make a model of a room for Stuart. Think about what kinds of things around your house could be used as furniture and personal items for Stuart's use.

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Responding to Literature Stuart Little described Ames' Crossing as "the loveliest town of all." The sights all around him were pleasant--houses, yards, fields, etc. It was the "most peaceful and beautiful spot he had found in all of his travels." He would have liked to have stayed there forever, but he would have missed his family, friends, and New York City, and, of course, he still needed to find Margalo. Ask students to describe a place they have visited that they felt was the loveliest place they had ever seen. What was special about the place? Who and what would they miss the most back at home if they stayed there? How did the place they were visiting compare to home? Were there any similarities to home, or was it very different?