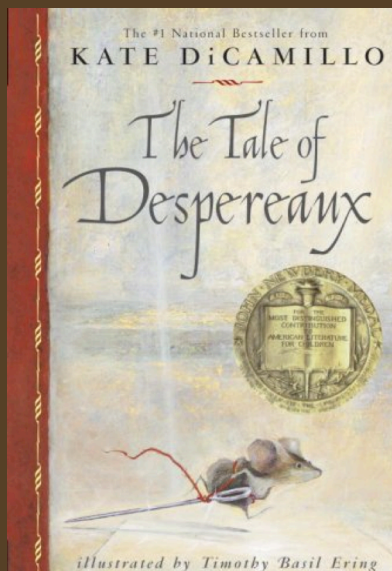


The Tale of Despereaux Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

Narrative Power: How does DiCamillo use the persona of the storyteller to create a unique author/narrator relationship with the reader? What power is at play?

Fairy Tale/Fable: How is this both a fairy tale and a fable, and yet also more than both of these—why use this technique? How is it also considered “high fantasy”?

Animal Fiction: What is the purpose of using animal fiction here? Why use animals, and why use these specific animals (mouse, rat)?

Unlikely Hero: Who is the unlikely hero in the text? Is there just one? How does it comment upon the figure of the hero? What about the figure of the villain?

Abuse: Consider the harsh reality of Miggery So. What is the function of this abuse in the text? How can children’s relate and/or feel empowered by it?

Quest: Consider the way Despereaux (in section four) characterizes his mission as a “quest”. How does the quest relate to the idea choice, fate, and destiny?

Mapping Character’s Hearts: “Like most hearts, it was complicated, shaded with dark and dappled with light.” What is the dark and light of each character? Could we “map” each person’s heart (as the narrator implies)?

Daybook Possibilities

- Kate DiCamillo is a well-known award winning author of children’s books. Research some of her other works and consider what kinds of topics she broaches. Why do you think she is so popular?
- The “quest” is a common troupe in children’s literature. List other stories that involve a quest and compare them. Research what critics note about the stages of the hero’s quest and track whether Despereaux fits into this model.
- Try to find other examples of animal fiction and examine reasons for this technique.
- How might you use or teach *The Tale of Despereaux* in your classroom? Brainstorm some lesson plan ideas, and research the common core standards to see how this book might fit into curriculum objectives.
- Add a scene to the story that gives a bit more information about one of the characters.
- Watch the movie version of *The Tale of Despereaux* and compare. How does the movie change the story? Why?
- Visit Kate DiCamillo’s website and report what you discover: <http://www.katedicamillo.com/>.

Suggested Critical Reading

Marah Gubar, "Species Trouble: The Abjection of Adolescence in E. B. White's *Stuart Little*."

Anna E. Altmann. "Welding Brass Tits on the Armor: An Examination of the Quest Metaphor in Robin Mckinley's *The Hero and the Crown*."

Cynthia Rostankowski, "The Monastic Life and the Warrior's Quest: The Middle Ages from the Viewpoint of Animals in Brian Jacques's *Redwall* Novels."

These articles can be located using the Project Muse database on the library's website.

Background and Context

Broken into four books that focus on the intertwining stories of Despereaux, Roscuro, and Miggery Sow, *The Tale of Despereaux* combines high and animal fantasy to explore the nuance between light and dark and what it means to be a hero. Kate DiCamillo won the Newbery award for *Despereaux* in 2004, and again for *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures* ten years later.