

Rabbit

Author: Margaret Beames

Illustrator: Ian McNee

Synopsis

Jack is sure that this birthday he is finally going to get the dog that he had been asking for. But when he opens the box he finds not a puppy but a rabbit! Jack is extremely disappointed until he realises that this is not just any rabbit. This rabbit can talk. Jack decides to call his extraordinary rabbit Henry. When Jack learns that his father got Henry from a man at his work whose son is involved in the animal rights movement he begins to wonder if Henry has been rescued from a laboratory somewhere. Of course Jack needs to make sure that he keeps Henry a secret or who knows what experiments people will want to carry out on him. But telling his best friend Nick won't do any harm will it? And it isn't Jack's fault that his neighbour Rosie Berryman overhears him talking to Henry and puts two and two together. Problems really start to arise when Rosie tells her older brother Jason about Henry. Jason decides that a talking rabbit is bound to raise a lot of money so he steals Henry and sells him to a horrible man named Cuddy. What follows is a dangerous adventure for Jack, Nick and Rosie as they try and rescue Henry from a terrible fate.

Text Type

Rabbit is a fast-paced adventure story with broad appeal for both boys and girls. Written by New Zealand author Margaret Beames, *Rabbit* is a short illustrated novel with enough action to keep even the most reluctant reader engaged. The story is written in easy to understand colloquial language and deals with a number of topical issues for young people including bullying, friendship and loyalty. The novel deals with the important issue of animal testing and cruelty and could be used as a springboard for a study on the ethical issues surrounding animal experimentation. The story is beautifully illustrated with pencil sketches.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5–21), Chapters 3–9 (pp. 23–84) and Chapters 10–15 (pp. 85–135).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of unfamiliar words and ideas presented in the text. Have them make predictions and inferences about the text. Wherever possible have students relate Jack's experiences at school and at home with their own broader experiences. While the story has a fantasy element it is written in such a way that it is easy for students to make the leap of reality into a world where rabbits can talk. Discuss the wider issues that are alluded to in this novel including animal experimentation and animal rights. Encourage students to research these issues and formulate their own opinions about them.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What does Jack want for his birthday? What does he receive instead?
- What do you think is special about the rabbit?
- What does the cover illustration suggest might happen in the story?

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5–21) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 5–21)

- How long has Jack wanted a dog for? Why are his parents reluctant to get him one? Why is Jack convinced that he is going to get a dog for his birthday?
- What does Jack find inside the box? How does Jack react when he sees it?
- What is special about the rabbit?
- Why does the rabbit tell Jack that he will only speak to him?
- What does Jack decide to call the rabbit?
- Why does Jack think that Henry is bossy?
- Why does Jack spend so much time talking to Henry?
- Why does Jack describe himself as “a bit of a loner”?
- Why did Jack invite Nick Spasky to his birthday party?
- Who are Kev Slater and Ant Higgins?
- Who is spying at Jack over the fence?

Discussion

- Would you rather have a rabbit or a puppy? Why?
- What do you think the rabbit might need Jack for?
- Have you ever been bullied at school? Why do you think some kids feel the need to pick on others? What do you think the best way to deal with a bully is?
- Why do you think Henry is able to speak?
- What do you think will happen next in the story?

Students read Chapters 3–9 (pp. 23–84) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3–9 (pp. 23–84)

- Why is Rosie suspicious about Henry? Why does Jack think that he will have to be careful in the future?
- Why is Jack hungry when he gets home from school?
- Why doesn't Jack want to tell his parents about the boys bullying him at school?
- What did Kev and Ant do to Jack at school? What have they done in the past to other students? What plan does Henry come up with to get the bullies into trouble?
- Who overhears Jack's conversation with Henry?
- Where did Jack's dad get Henry from? Why does Jack think that Henry might have been stolen?
- How did Rosie's mum react when she told her about the talking rabbit? Who does she decide to tell next?
- What does Jack leave in Henry's hutch before he goes to school?
- How does Jack know that Ant has his cell phone at school?
- Why is Nick so keen to help Jack get one back on Ant?
- What happens when Jack goes for the ball in the lineout?
- Why can't Jack find the cell phone? How does Henry manage to get both boys into trouble at once?
- Who overhears Henry on the phone?
- Who did Jack tell about the plan to get Ant and Kev in trouble? How does he feel about betraying Henry's trust?
- How does Henry know that Jack has told Nick about him?
- What punishment were Ant and Kev given for the cell phone incident?
- What did Henry say to Ant that scared him?
- Why is Jason so excited when he overhears Henry talking to Nick and Jack over the fence? In what way does he think he can profit from the talking rabbit? Why does Jason think that he needs to act immediately?
- When does Jack discover that Henry is missing? Why is he certain that he has been stolen? Who does Jack suspect?
- How does Jack know that Rosie feels guilty about something? What does she admit to him?
- Why does Jack think that Jason took Henry?

- Why doesn't Rosie want to ask Jason outright if he took Henry?
- How does Rosie trick Jason into telling her that he had to take something somewhere? Why does he confess to stealing Henry? How does Jack try to justify his actions?
- Why does Jason think Henry should be in a laboratory? Who is Jason planning on delivering Henry to?
- Why doesn't Rosie tell her brother what she really thinks about what he has done?
- Why does Jack want to talk to the man his dad bought Henry from?
- What does Rosie tell Jack at school? Why doesn't Jack want Rosie to go with him and Nick to visit Grant?
- How does Nick know Grant?
- What did Henry's name use to be?
- What information does Grant give the boys about Henry's background?
- Who is Cuddy? Where did he take Henry? What did he do to Henry? How did Grant rescue Henry?
- What did the police find when they visited Cuddy's house?
- Why does Grant regret his actions? What does he think Cuddy did with the other animals?
- Why did Grant give Henry to someone else to look after?

Discussion

- If you were in Jack's position how would you deal with Kev and Ant?
- Describe Henry's personality. In what ways is he a good friend to Jack?
- What do you think would happen to Henry in a laboratory?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

Students read Chapters 10–15 (pp. 85–135) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 10–15 (pp. 85–135)

- What plan does Nick come up with so that he and Jack can go and look for Cuddy?
- How do the boys find out where Cuddy lives? How do they get there?
- What do Jack and Nick do when they arrive at Cuddy's house? What do they see in the shed? Where do they think Cuddy might be?
- How does Rosie convince Jason to tell her what time he is going out?

- Who is the tall, black figure? How do Jack and Nick feel when he reveals himself?
- What was Grant's original plan? How does Jack convince him to change his mind? Where does Grant go?
- How do Nick and Jack know that someone has arrived at Cuddy's house? Who is it? What does he have with him?
- Who is hiding in the back of Jason's car? What does she see Jason do? Why does she decide to go out to the street?
- Why does Jack decide to go into the house? What do he and Nick overhear at the bottom of the stairs? Why does Cuddy tell Jason that he is in no position to bargain?
- How does Rosie get left behind?
- What does Jack see when he peers through the attic door? When does he plan to grab Henry?
- What happens with Jack and Henry's parents realise the boys are missing? How does Mrs Berryman react when she realises that Rosie is missing too?
- What realisation does Jason come to when his mother tell him that Rosie isn't in her room?
- What does Grant see when he returns from getting something to eat? Why doesn't he want to enter the house?
- How does Rosie feel being left alone in the dark?
- Why does Rosie run to the house?
- What sound disturbs Cuddy in the attic? What does Jack do when Cuddy goes downstairs?
- Why does Jack think that Henry is more scared than he will admit?
- What causes the sound that alerts Cuddy to the fact that something is going on upstairs?
- Why can't Jack, Henry and Nick get back down the stairs?
- What does Cuddy do to Rosie? Why does Jack hand Henry over to him?
- How does Cuddy react when Henry speaks?
- Why isn't Jack able to help Henry with his escape?
- Who stops Cuddy from being able to escape? Why is Jack so happy even though he knows he will be in trouble?

Discussion

- Do you agree with experimentation on animals? Why/why not?
- Would breaking into Cuddy's to rescue Henry be justifiable? Why/why not?

- In what ways is Nick a good friend to Jack?

Activities

Research – Conduct a research assignment on bullying. Look at why people bully others and the affects that bullying can have on the victims. Present your findings as an essay, on a poster or as an oral presentation.

Poster – Design an anti-bullying poster to display at your school.

Letter – Imagine that you are Jack. Write a diary entry explaining what happened on the night you rescued Henry and describing your thoughts and feelings about it.

Writing – Rewrite a chapter in the novel from Henry’s point of view.

Plot – Choose 15 important events from the story and create a flow diagram that shows the order in which they occur.

Theme – Identify an important theme in the novel. Write several paragraphs explaining how the theme is developed by the author. Back up your ideas with evidence and quotes from the text.

Issue – Conduct a research assignment and use the information to write a pamphlet against animal testing.

Letter – Write a letter to a friend about *Rabbit*. Include a brief plot summary, some information about the characters and an explanation about what the novel teaches us. Include reasons why you think your friend should read the novel.

Drama – Choose an exciting part of the story and write a script for it. Remember to include a cast of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd