

The Rat Prince

by Bridget Hodder

A Reading, Activity and Discussion Guide Aligned
with the Common Core College and Career
Readiness Anchor Standards
Grades 4 - 6

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How to Use this Guide:

The Common Core Curriculum is divided into "strands". They're roughly equivalent to what most people think of as "subjects" that students study in school. The subjects, or "strands" we will address in this guide are part of the "English Language Arts" curriculum, and they are: **Reading, Writing, Speaking/ Listening.**

The Common Core has what they call "Anchor Standards" within each of these subjects. Put simply, these "Anchor Standards" are skills that will be taught to each student, every year, at a level appropriate to his/her grade. By learning these specific skills, students will master the larger subjects, which should make them ready for college and/ or a career. (Hence, the name "College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards", or CCR.)

Notations in this guide follow the Common Core notation, described by the Common Core website as follows (with my addition in [brackets]):

"Individual CCR anchor standards can be identified by their strand, CCR status, and number (R.CCR.6, for example). Individual grade-specific standards can be identified by their strand, grade, and number (or number and letter, where applicable), so that RI.4.3, for example, stands for Reading, Informational Text, grade 4, standard 3 and W.5.1a stands for Writing, grade 5, standard 1a."

The questions and activities in this guide are keyed to the ELA Standards of the Core Curriculum for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening.

Activities and topics related to *The Rat Prince* will be conveniently labeled with the relevant standards they address, to make it a breeze for teachers to put together a great, fun learning experience that really counts!

Post-Reading Activities for *The Rat Prince*

There are many themes in *The Rat Prince*, but the main ones deal with some very big issues. Some of these main themes are listed below, with appropriate questions and activities you may adapt for your class.

The themes themselves, and the questions posed by them, may also be used as a reading guide or for writing prompts at every grade level.

Theme 1: Sometimes heroes are the ones you least expect. Most of us pre-judge others by appearances, or by the groups to which they belong, or by our own expectations.

Prince Char and his people are considered dirty, disgusting and vile by most humans, but in reality they lead useful, interesting lives full of purpose, friendship and bravery. They are, in many ways, more noble than their human counterparts. They have much to teach the humans in this story. But the rats have also misjudged the humans in some ways, as Prince Char finds out.

This theme should make us think about groups who are misunderstood or disregarded in our world. The book shows us how much we all miss when we put others down just because they are different from ourselves.

Questions and Activities for Theme 1

Theme 1, Activity 1: Find examples within the text of characters pre-judging other characters, as mentioned above. For example, on page 5, Prince Char says of Lady Rose: "...we believed her to be a lackwit." Write about how pre-judging each other affected the characters and the way they felt and behaved. Be sure to support your statements with information from the text. (CSS:ELA-LITERACY/RL. 4.1, 5.1, 5.2, 6.2; CSS-ELA-LITERACY/W. 4.1, 5.1, 6.1)

Theme 1, Activity 2: What really makes a hero/ heroine?

Instructor Preparation:

Choose 4 examples of people who were unexpected heroes, or people who were told they wouldn't achieve their goals, simply because of who they were or what they looked like (Examples: Jackie Robinson, Temple

Grandin, Harriet Tubman, Albert Einstein). Call them "Class Heroes". Show pictures, ask for class input if the class already knows who they are, and give a brief explanation to the class of the important points of these heroic people's lives and contributions.

These people had to go through many difficulties to achieve what they did. Brainstorm a list with the class of other people, from their own experience, from history or from current events, who are heroes in spite of discrimination. Have students write an essay, or conduct a class discussion. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1 CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1, 5.1, 6.1)

Theme 1, Activity 3: Circle of Support

Step 1: Explain that in *The Rat Prince*, Prince Char has a support network of friendly rats and a mother who praises and instructs him, while Lady Rose does not. Everyone needs help to accomplish their goals. This is why Rose is trying to contact her old family friends.

In school and in life, we can create support networks for anyone, with our words and actions.

Step 2: Students then break into partner pairs. Each pair will make a list (you determine the length), with expectations on complexity geared to grade level, as below:

SUPPORTIVE THINGS I WOULD HAVE TOLD ROSE, IF I WERE ROSE'S FRIEND

Grade 4, example:

**I believe in you.*

Grade 6, example:

**I know your stepmother says terrible things to you. Stay strong. Don't believe her. She is the one with the problems. I am your friend forever.*

Step 3: Saying things is not enough. Try to brainstorm ways that, if you were a friend living next door, you might have helped Lady Rose.

Grade 4, example:

**I will leave food in the backyard if you are hungry.*

Grade 6, example:

**My advice is to secretly send Pye to me, with a letter to Sir Tompkin, so your stepmother won't get her hands on it. I will take it to Sir Tompkin.*

Step 4: Form a circle with the students, either standing or sitting. Then each partner pair can read their list to the class. If someone says something that isn't exactly encouraging, or that misses the point (like "Don't worry, Cinderella, you're going to be rich and all your problems will be solved!") it's an opportunity to discuss.

(CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1.A; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.B, 6.1A)

Thømø 2: The truest form of beauty lies not in our outward appearance, nor even in our thoughts...but in our actions toward others.

This theme is found throughout the book. But a particularly good example can be found when Prince Char is in the coach with Lady Rose, and he compliments her:

--"You are most courageous and intelligent" (pg.150)

--"...you are as kind and noble as the best of rats" (pg.155)

The only compliment he makes about her appearance is a very small one--so small that it's funny:

--"And may I just say, I quite admire those pretty glass slippers."

Questions and Activities for Thømø 2

Theme 2, Activity 1: Looking past what we see

Discuss in small groups or in the general classroom:

Lady Rose is used to being valued for her outward beauty. No one looks past her face to realize how hard she's working to save her family, or how brave

she is. How do you think it made her feel when Prince Char complimented her upon her character and intelligence?

Compare and contrast this with the compliments given to Lady Rose by Prince Geoffrey on pg. 163:

--"How is it I have never before seen this goddess of love and beauty? What need for a ball, or a search, when perfection has been so close at hand all along?"

How do you think Lady Rose feels when a prince (who has only just now noticed she's alive) calls her "perfection" based on her appearance alone?

Are your opinions on these subjects different from your classmates' opinions? Why might they be different?

Is it important or not important to talk about how judging people by their looks can affect us?

Find more examples in the text of how other characters compliment Lady Rose. Compare and contrast what these compliments tell us about the characters themselves. Younger grades may want to simply compare and contrast how the compliments might have made Lady Rose feel.

(CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL5.1, 5.3.1; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL6.1)

Theme 2, Activity 2: Passing Notes

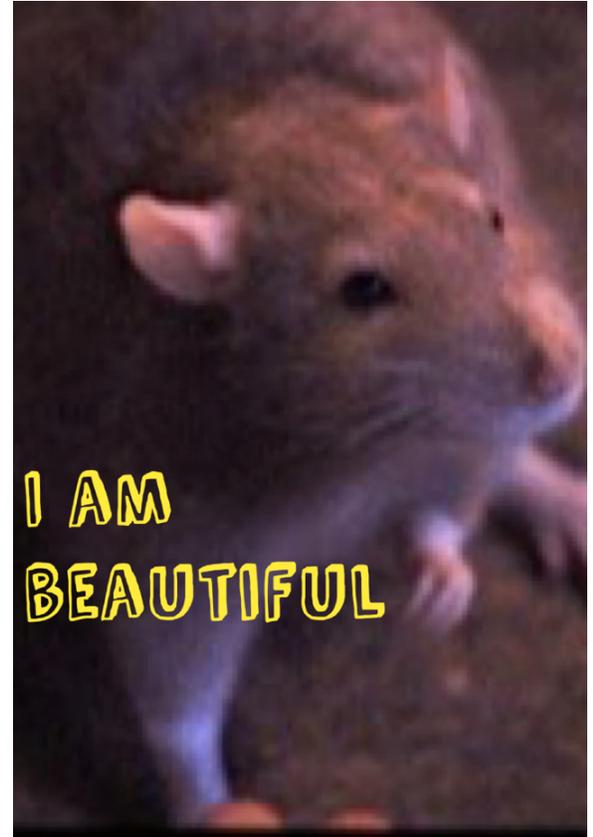
If you were Lady Rose's friend, and attended the ball with her, what would you have said to her about Prince Geoffrey after she met him? Would you have told her to go for it, or would you have warned her that "insta-love" isn't real?

Handwrite her a note on paper that you would pass to her, telling her what you think, and giving reasons for it that you take from the text. Try to convince her that you are right, putting together a careful argument to support your position. For Grade 6: try to use the formal kind of language the characters use in the book.

(CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3B; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3B; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2.E)

Theme 2, Activity 3: Theme memes:

Using photos from the internet and text from Pic Collage, or using pictures cut from magazines and gel pens or paint, create memes that focus on the theme of how beauty is not necessarily what we expect. Take the point of view of different characters in the text, as demonstrated in the example. Show them to the class, and explain the incidents from the text upon which you are basing these images and statements. (CSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1A, 5.1A, 6.1D; CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7)



Thème 3: What does "humanity" mean to us? Is it about our bodies, or is it about our beliefs and how we act upon them?

When she changes him into a coachman on the night of the ball, the fairy-goddess tells Prince Char, "You have the form of a man. Now it is time to truly become one." Throughout the rest of the book, Prince Char tries to figure out what this means. We, too, need to figure out what being human means to us...and then strive, like Char, to achieve it.

Questions and Activities for Thème 3

Theme 3, Activity 1: The Human Factor

There are two princes in this book, Prince Char and Prince Geoffrey. Which character do you think most deserves to be called "human", and why? Do you agree with the judgment handed down by the fairy-goddess at the end of the book to Prince Geoffrey? Why, or why not? What does "humanity" mean to you?

Fill out the worksheet below with the class. Then have each student write a paragraph, page or essay on the topic. They must support their points of view with reasons and information from the text.

(CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1, 4.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1, 5.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.1)

Scroll down for worksheet....

Theme 3, Activity 2: You Be the Judge

Making decisions about right and wrong is part of human experience. When Lady Rose lets Cook go free after she confesses to being part of a crime, did Rose do the right thing, or the wrong thing? Did Lady Rose do it because she appreciated Cook's repentance, or because she felt Cook was not truly guilty of the crime, or both...or something else? Do you agree with what Lady Rose did in this scene? What would you have done in her place? Write a response, or arrange a classroom "court session" where you argue the questions. Support points of view with reasons and information from the text. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.1)

Theme 3, Activity 3: Eustacia's Epilogue

At the end of the book, Jessamyn's older sister, Eustacia, who has been cruel to Lady Rose, disappears when her mother is in trouble. Is there hope for Eustacia to be sorry for her actions, and become a better person? Or do you think she will become truly wicked like Wilhemina? Write an epilogue to the book that tells what happened to Eustacia after the book ends. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.4)

Theme 4: Taking on the point of view of other people, or other creatures, helps us grow and understand.

One of the most interesting things about *THE RAT PRINCE* is how it is told in part from the point of view of a rat, who has lots of observations to make about humans. On page 16, Prince Char says of Lady Rose: "No rat would have humbled herself thus." Also look at what he has to say about the human system of royal succession (page 44), among many other examples.

We live in a time where humans have become so numerous, our individual actions can result in collective disaster for other species on the planet. Taking on the point of view of other, non-human creatures, can reveal things about our behavior that we might need to change. It can also teach us to laugh at ourselves!

Questions and Activities for Theme 4

Theme 4, Activity 1: How does the author make the "voice" of the rat seem different from a human's? Notice, for example, that the metaphors the rats use are almost always related to things more important to rats than to humans. In addition, there are several mentions of rat-proverbs. Find examples within the text. Compare and contrast Prince Char's point of view with Lady Rose's point of view.

More advanced students may wish to analyze the different points of view of Sir Tompkin and Lady Rose in their reunion scene, and in the scene where Cook makes her confession. Sir Tompkin still thinks of Rose as a little girl; his view of her changes as the scene goes on, until he acknowledges her bravery. Rose respects Sir Tompkin as her elder and a family friend; but she is annoyed when he talks down to her (telling her he will "not trouble [her] pretty little head"), and she worries that he won't consider her "ladylike" if she wolfs down her food. But her uncertainty becomes confidence as the reunion scene, and then the confession scene in the Zhinese parlor, unfold. Rose is an adult, and she realizes it. (CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3, 4.6, 5.6; 6.6;)

Theme 4, Activity 2: This fairy tale takes place in a fictional past. Part of the way the author demonstrates this is by having characters use old-style language. Find old-style vocabulary words in the text that you did not understand at first. Were you able to tell what they meant by the context? In groups, guess at what the words mean. Then look them up and write down the definitions. (Teachers determine how long the lists will be, according to time and grade level parameters.) Try saying some of the sentences in the book out loud with the class in a more modern style. Do these sentences sound strange? Would the author have been able to convey the characters' point of view properly if she had used a modern language style? (CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.4, 5.4, 6.4)

Theme 5: The right thing to do is often the hard thing. But doing it gives lasting satisfaction and happiness.

Lady Rose wants to protect her confused, ill father and her sweet stepsister Jessamyn. She also wants to bring Wilhemina to justice. So she makes a difficult choice, to become like a servant in her own household, in order to achieve her goals. And she does, achieving her own happy ending.

Prince Char works hard with his best friend Swiss, to rule and support the rats of the Northern Realm. Then he takes on the risky task of setting up Rose as the "Rat Candidate for Queen". When he sets up a mission to go spy on the human prince at the castle, he makes the task seem like it is more risky than he believes it to be, in order to make his people feel good about doing it: "...I'd played up the drama of the moment to give my people the pleasure of being witnesses and participants in a great endeavor. That is how rats get the chance to feel like heroes." (pg. 83) He knows perfectly well that it feels good to do good, and brave folk are inspired to do great deeds.

Theme 5, Activity 1: Risky Business

Without the risk-taking and the hard work of many characters in the book, there could not have been a happy ending. Make a list of all the characters who worked or risked something in order to make the happy ending of the book possible. Why did they do what they did? Is risk-taking without hard work a good thing or a bad thing? (hint: gambling; drugs)

Assign a group of students to each character. Have them brainstorm motivations for the character, write a list, and choose a spokesperson for the group. Then bring the class back together and allow each spokesperson to act out the chosen character in front of the class, explaining why they did what they did, and why they thought the work and the risk were worth it.

Discuss: can you think of real life people who took risks and worked hard in order to achieve great success or goals? How about people who took foolish risks for the wrong reasons? What happened to them?

Theme 5, Activity 2: Author Q & A

Writing *The Rat Prince* took the author, Bridget Hodder, about six crazy months to write. She never stopped writing, hardly slept, and injured her elbows! Investing all that time and work into a book she wasn't sure would ever get published, was a risk Bridget is now very glad she took.

Brainstorm questions about the writing process with your class, pick the three most thoughtful ones, and contact the author through her website, www.BridgetHodder.com. She'll be happy to answer them!

Or contact her through www.BridgetHodder.com to arrange an author visit to your school, or a Skype visit that will bring your classroom into her "castle of creativity" for a look around and a talk about any of the burning questions you have after reading *The Rat Prince!*

BONUS Common Core Activity!
Cinderella at the MOVIES!

The Core Curriculum encourages teachers to share cinematic (or other) versions of a text, to allow students to explore how different media affect the development of narrative and theme.

The Rat Prince! is perfect for this! There are many movie adaptations of the fairytale of Cinderella. You can follow any of the themes mentioned above through a movie version (such as the animated Disney film).
(CCSS/ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.5; CCSS/ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.5; CCSS/ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.2; CCSS/ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.7)