

# Fourth Grade Rats



By

Jerry Spinelli

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

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**About the author:** Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit [novelstudies.org](http://novelstudies.org).

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## Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on two chapters of *Fourth Grade Rats* and is comprised of the following activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

**Every activity need not be completed by all students.**

### Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

**Themes** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include family and friendship, peer pressure, personal growth.

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## List of Skills

### Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *anagrams*
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Identify/create *similes*
11. Identification of root words

### Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

### Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.

### Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

### Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

### Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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## Synopsis

Suds may have been the perfect third-grade angel last year, but now he's in fourth grade it's time to be . . . a rat! His best friend, Joey, knows all about being a rat: pushing little kids off the swings, saying good-bye to lunch boxes and PB&J and definitely no crying allowed.

Suds isn't so sure he wants to be a rat, but Joey is quickly becoming the most popular kid in class with his troublemaking ways. Even Judy Billings is starting to pay attention. If Suds doesn't become a rat, will he just turn . . . invisible? [The Publisher]

A complete synopsis and other helpful reviews can be found online at such sites as the following: <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/book/fourth-grade-rats#cart/cleanup>

## Author Biography

*Jerry Spinelli*

Born in 1941 in Norristown, Pennsylvania, Jerry Spinelli discovered his calling in 1957 when his high school football team won a big game. The town celebrated, his fellow students raced through the streets, but Jerry sneaked back home and marked the occasion in his own way. He wrote a poem. Later the town newspaper published it. "And," he reports, "I've been a writer ever since."

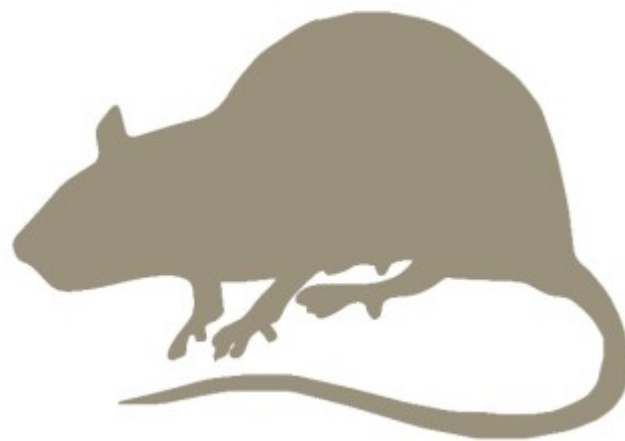
Married to Eileen Spinelli, who is also a writer, Jerry was for many years an editor for the Chilton Company. Now a full-time writer, he lives in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania.



Jerry Spinelli's immensely popular books include *Space Station Seventh Grade*, *Jason and Marceline, Who Put That Hair in My Toothbrush?*, and *Maniac Magee*, which has won more than fifteen state children's book awards in addition to the Newbery Medal.



# Fourth Grade Rats



*By Jerry Spinelli*

Name:

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# Fourth Grade Rats

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## Chapters 1-2



### Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *Fourth Grade Rats* is nine-year-old Suds who is about to embark on several days he will never forget. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an interesting **protagonist**?




### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

ignored	miracle	impressed	pretzel
physical	baloney	smirked	disappeared

1. Judy Billings didn't seem to be very \_\_\_\_\_ with Suds, no matter what he did.
2. The entire submarine sandwich quickly \_\_\_\_\_ down his throat.
3. Mr. Bustrain \_\_\_\_\_ Kevin when he put his hand up.
4. That \_\_\_\_\_ has too much salt on it.
5. Jeremy doesn't get enough \_\_\_\_\_ exercise.
6. Henry simply \_\_\_\_\_ when Denny suggested that he was gaining weight.
7. It will take a \_\_\_\_\_ to get my dad off the couch.
8. Joey asked his mother to make him a \_\_\_\_\_ sandwich.



# Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One?


2. How did Suds hurt himself at recess?


3. How did Suds feel about Judy Billings? How did she feel about him?


4. In Chapter One Joey gives Suds at least three rules that Rats should live by. What are they?

1.	
2.	
3.	

5. Why do you think it was so important to Joey that he and Suds should be eating baloney sandwiches instead of peanut butter and jelly?


6. How would you have felt if Mrs. Simms treated you as she did Suds in Chapter Two?


## Good to Know ~ Baloney

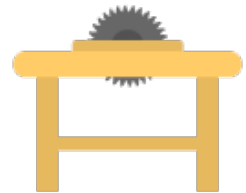
In Chapter Two Suds wonders if baloney comes from *herds of balonies roaming around on ranches*. **Bologna**, sometimes phonetically spelled as **baloney**, boloney or polony, is a sausage derived from the Italian mortadella, a finely ground pork sausage containing cubes of lard, originally from the Italian city of Bologna.



## Language Activities

### A. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in the first two chapters of *Fourth Grade Rats*.

Word	Anagram	Clue
rat		A sticky substance.
eat		A beverage.
first		Cracks; breaks.
angel		Point of view <u>or</u> a math term.
table		Sound of a sheep.
care		A unit of land.
swear		Has on one's body.

Now find two additional words from the first two chapters which have interesting anagrams to see if you can stump a classmate.

Word	Anagram	Clue

## B. Even Joey Would Enjoy This Quatrain Poem.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The following quatrain was written about the poor, misunderstood rat.

*Oh I'm so glad I was born a rat,  
Though some may ask me why.  
I'm not so nice for looking at,  
And I live in a piggish sty.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - B - A - B**. Other rhyming schemes include: AABB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBB, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in the first two chapters of our novel.

### The Quatrain Poem

Now create your own Quatrain Poem on a subject of your choice. Your poem must follow the format of a quatrain poem described above (and must rhyme).

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_


## C. Exaggeration

**Exaggeration** in a literary device defined as *a statement that represents something as better or worse than it really is*. We find an example of this in Chapter One: *Heaven was a trainload of those seconds*.



Think of an exaggerated way of describing the following:

A grade one student on a swing.	
The noise of a chain saw.	
Superman.	
A girl's curly hair.	

**D. Personification** is giving human qualities to something that is not human. Here's an example from Chapter One: *My lunch box just kept rolling along*.

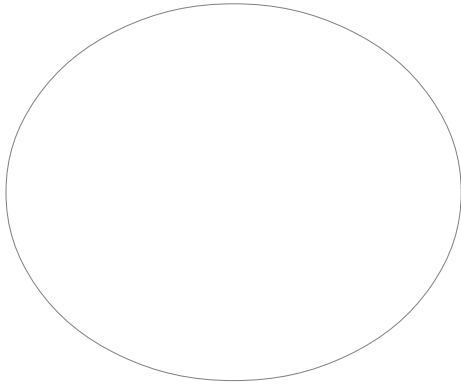
Describe how the lunch box is personified in this example.


Create your own example of personification.

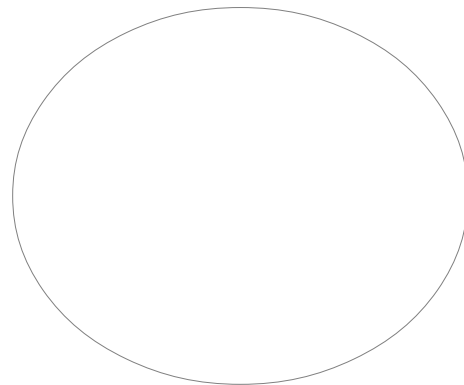

As you continue to read through the novel be on the lookout for other examples of this literary device. If you should find one, come back to this question and enter it below.


## E. 5 Ws and an H.

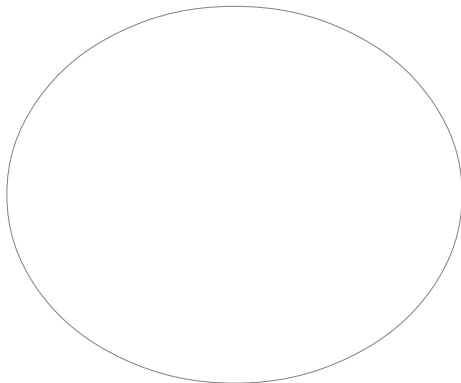
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



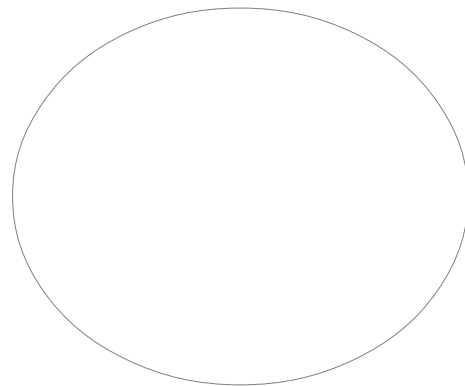
***WHO?***



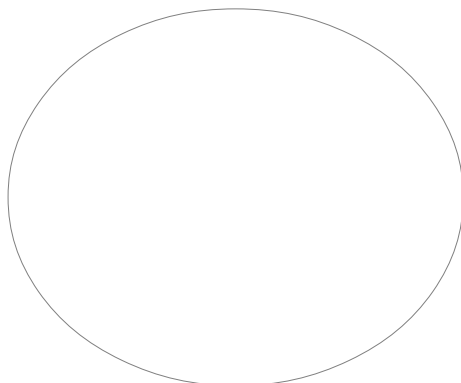
***WHAT?***



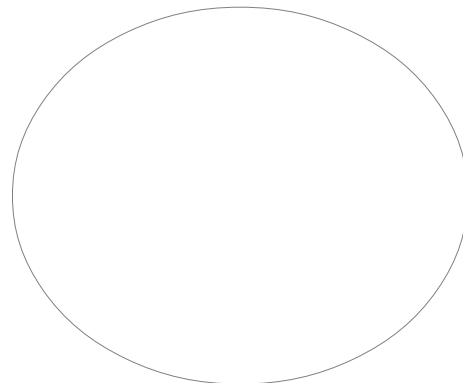
***WHEN?***



***WHERE?***



***WHY?***



***HOW?***

# Extension Activity



## Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A story-board can tell the story of only one scene - or the entire novel. Complete the story-board below illustrating the events described in the first two chapters of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



1	2
3	4
5	6