

Watership Down



By
Richard Adams

A Novel Study
By Nat Reed

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Table of Contents

Suggestions and Expectations	3
List of Skills	4
Synopsis / Author Biography	5
Student Checklist	6
Reproducible Student Booklet	7
Answer Key	87

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.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways and is comprised of these 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 the following:

- 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 and **topics** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include survival, leadership, community, personal growth, the struggles between tyranny and freedom, reason and blind emotion, and the individual and the corporate state.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying / creating *alliteration*
4. *Word families*
5. Identifying parts of speech
6. Identify *anagrams*
7. Listing compound words
8. Identify *personification*
9. Identify/create *similes/metaphors*
10. 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. Identify the climax of the novel
4. Five W's Chart

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Protagonists
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Comparing two Characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Chart
5. Create a poem
6. Conduct an interview
7. Write a description of personal feelings
8. Write a book review
9. Do a Book Talk
10. Express opinions

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a movie poster
3. Create a comic strip
4. Design a cover for the novel
5. Create a graphic novel
6. Design an Information Card

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Synopsis

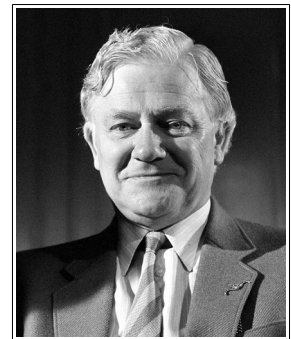
The 40th anniversary edition of Richard Adams' picaresque saga about a motley band of rabbits - *Watership Down* is one of the most beloved novels of our time. Sandleford Warren is in danger. Hazel's younger brother Fiver is convinced that a great evil is about to befall the land, but no one will listen. And why would they when it is Spring and the grass is fat and succulent? So together Hazel and Fiver and a few other brave rabbits secretly leave behind the safety and strictures of the warren and hop tentatively out into a vast and strange world. Chased by their former friends, hunted by dogs and foxes, avoiding farms and other human threats, but making new friends, Hazel and his fellow rabbits dream of a new life in the emerald embrace of *Watership Down*. (Courtesy of the Publisher)

The best story about wild animals since The Wind in the Willows. Very funny, exciting, often moving' Evening Standard 'A great book. A whole world is created, perfectly real in itself, yet constituting a deep incidental comment on human affairs. (The Guardian)

Author Biography

Richard Adams

Richard Adams grew up in Berkshire, the son of a country doctor. After an education at Oxford, he spent six years in the army and then went into the Civil Service. He originally began telling the story of *Watership Down* to his two daughters and they insisted he publish it as a book. It quickly became a huge success with both children and adults, and won the Guardian Children's Fiction Award and the Carnegie Medal in 1972. Richard Adams has written many novels and short stories, including *Shardik* and *The Plague Dogs*. Richard Adams passed away in 2016. (Courtesy of the Publisher)



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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

[illegible]

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Name:

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Chapters 1-4



Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The protagonist of *Watership Down* is Hazel, the leader of a band of rabbits who leave their home to establish a new warren. What challenges might a novelist encounter whose main characters are animals rather than humans?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

warren	aristocrat	wretched	impulsive
telepathic	dissension	devolve	intersperse

1. “I was feeling so _____ this morning, I stayed in bed,” John’s mother said.
2. Karen began to _____ the candies among other prizes.
3. The rabbits’ _____ extended several feet beneath the earth’s surface.
4. Laverne has good judgment, but sometimes makes _____ decisions.
5. He is so stuck-up, you’d swear he thought he was an _____.
6. The hurricane was so _____ it leveled several city blocks.
7. The conversation began to _____ into a real shouting match.
8. Do you think that magician really has _____ abilities?

Questions



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

2. Match each name with the proper description:

1	Holly		A	A rather slow, stupid fellow.
2	Fiver		B	Threarah got under his skin.
3	Bigwig		C	The protagonist.
4	Blackberry		D	Captain of Owsla.
5	Hazel		E	Visionary.
6	Buckthorn		F	A friend of Fiver.
7	Silver		G	Thought there were too many bucks in the warren.
8	Threarah		H	A nephew of Threarah.
9	Pipkin		I	The Chief Rabbit
10	Hawkbit		J	A tough sturdy fellow.

3. Describe the following groups of rabbits:

Outskirters	
Owsla	

4. Fiver had a nightmare which spelled doom for their warren. What was it that was looming on the horizon?

5. According to Fiver why didn't Threarah's solution to the dilemma not go far enough?

6. Why did Hazel consider Bigwig's alliance with them to be a mixed blessing?

7. Hazel suggests that Threarah doesn't like anything he hasn't thought of himself. Why is this not a good characteristic for a leader to have?

8. How did both Bigwig and Hazel show leadership skills during and after the fight with the Owsia rabbits?

Language Activities



A. What Do You Know About Rabbits?

Although this is a fantasy novel, the author provides helpful information on **rabbits**. Using the first four chapters as well as what you already know about this animal, research and record three fascinating facts about rabbits and list this information below.

1	
2	
3	

B. How Much Do You Know About the Protagonist?

Character's Name _____

Sketch a picture of the protagonist in the middle hexagon. In the surrounding text boxes enter words that would describe the protagonist (either his/her personality traits or descriptive words about his/her appearance).

The diagram consists of a central hexagon. Surrounding the hexagon are seven rounded rectangular text boxes. On the left side, there are three boxes stacked vertically. On the right side, there are three boxes stacked vertically. At the bottom center, there is one box. These boxes are intended for students to write descriptive words or personality traits for the protagonist.

C. 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 **PAN** can also form the word **NAP**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



- read the clue in the right-hand column.
- Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters.

Each of the words in the left-hand column are found in this section of our novel.

Word	Anagram	Clue
slope		Ski ___.
hear		Mammal resembling a large rabbit.
where		A person who cuts wood.
warren		One who signals.
reason		Spanish Mrs.
angry		A tall slim person.
stream		Those who domesticate animals.

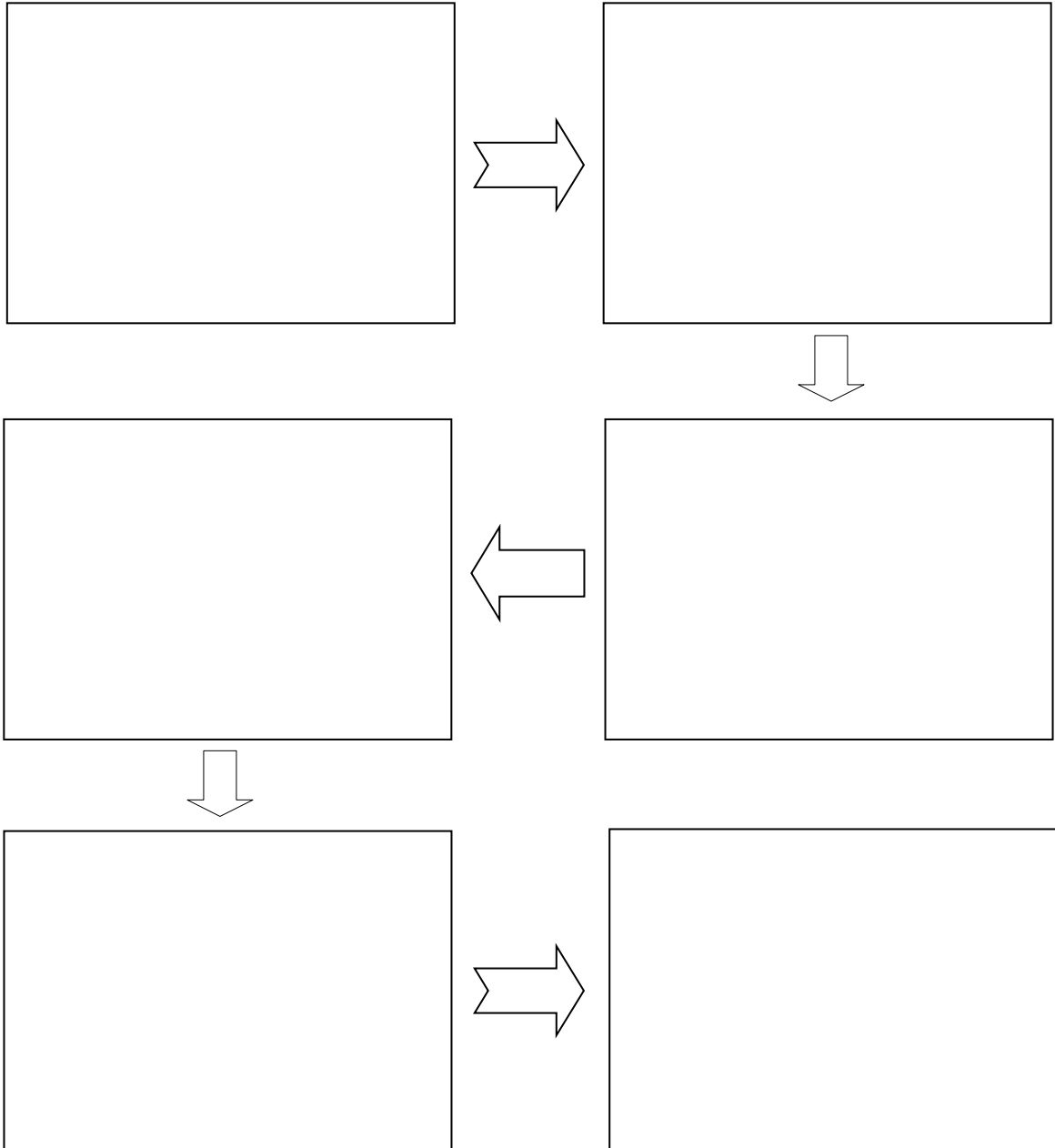
D. There are some words which can act as nouns or verbs, depending on their use in the sentence. Use your imagination and write sentences to illustrate how these words (found in this section) can be used as both a noun and a verb.

LAND	
Noun	
Verb	

BANK	
Noun	
Verb	

E. Sequence Chart

Choose what you consider to be the six most important events in these chapters. In each of the six boxes below list the six events that you have chosen, describing what happened and telling why you consider this to be an essential part of the story.



Extension Activity



Storyboard

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



1	2
3	4
5	6