

Sample Pages from

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH

by Robert C. O'Brien

1972 Newbery Medal Winner



A Novel Teaching Pack

by Margaret Whisnant

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ISBN 978-1-934538-08-1

Taking Grades Publishing Company
1110 4th St. Dr., S.E.
Conover, NC 28613
www.takinggrades.com

Table of Contents

	Pages
Chapter Summaries	1-8
Before You Read	9-10
Vocabulary	
Word List with Definitions	11-12
Word Keys Game.....	13-17
Dictionary Digs.	18-21
Energetic Verbs	22
Acronyms and Initializations—Words with Secret ID’s.	23
Word Keys from the Past	24
Reading Assessment	
Short Answer	25-28
Objective Tests	29-61
Think, Write, Create	
Chapter Activities.....	62-68
Whole Book Activities	69-72
Graphic Organizers	73-82
Keys	83-90

Chapter Summaries

The Sickness of Timothy Frisby

- Mrs. Frisby, a widow mouse whose husband died the previous year, lives in a cinder block home buried in the vegetable garden of a farmer named Mr. Fitzgibbon.
- One day at the very end of February, Mrs. Frisby leaves her home to find food for her four children and discovers a storehouse of corn in a stump.
- Mrs. Frisby's younger son Timothy, smartest and frailest of her children, is not feeling well. He refuses to eat when his mother returns with food.
- While Mrs. Frisby is out with two of her children gathering the corn she has found, Timothy's condition worsens.
- Mrs. Frisby knows she must go to Mr. Ages for medicine.

Mr. Ages

- Mr. Ages, a white mouse who was a friend of Mrs. Frisby's late husband, makes medicines from plants.
- Mrs. Frisby takes the longest route to Mr. Ages' home on the other side of the farm to avoid the cat.
- Mr. Ages once saved baby Timothy's life when he was bitten by a spider.
- Though he seems old, Mr. Ages is spry.
- Mr. Ages says Timothy has pneumonia and will recover this time.
- Mr. Ages warns that Timothy must not get cold or breathe cold air for three weeks to a month or the pneumonia could come back and Timothy could die.

The Crow and the Cat

- To avoid walking alone in the woods at night, Mrs. Frisby takes the short route home across the farm where there is danger from Dragon, the Fitzgibbon's cat.
- Mrs. Frisby finds a young crow named Jeremy tied to a fence by a piece of silver-colored string.
- Mrs. Frisby chews the string and frees the crow, saving him from certain death.
- The commotion attracts Dragon, but Jeremy saves himself and Mrs. Frisby by carrying her on his back and flying away.
- Jeremy flies Mrs. Frisby home.

Mr. Fitzgibbon's Plow

- As Mr. Ages predicts, Timothy recovers in three days.
- Before Mr. Fitzgibbon's plow destroys her garden home, Mrs. Frisby will need to move her family to their summer home at the edge of a brook.
- The warm weather causes Mrs. Frisby to worry that Moving Day will come too soon to be safe for Timothy.
- Outside on a warm morning, Mrs. Frisby meets a lady shrew who predicts that Farmer Fitzgibbon will be plowing in a few days.
- Mrs. Frisby remembers that her husband used to say: All doors are hard to unlock until you have the key.
- Mrs. Frisby is frightened by the sound of Mr. Fitzgibbon starting his tractor.

Word Lists with Definitions

(Arranged According to Story Order)

(Part One: *The Sickness of Timothy Frisby—A Powder for Dragon*)

- preceding** To come, exist, or occur before in time (p.4)
- rancid** Nasty; having a disagreeable odor or taste due to decomposition; rank (p.4)
- warily** Cautiously; in a manner that is watchful or on guard. (p.5)
- hypochondriac** A person who worries about personal health, imagined diseases, and symptoms so that normal living habits are disrupted (p. 10)
- tedious** Tiresome by reason of slowness, length, or dullness; boring (p. 11)
- relentlessly** Steadily and persistently; without ceasing (p.13)
- draughts** (variation of **draft**) a measured portion; a dose (p.14)
- vigorous** Strong, energetic, and active in mind or body; robust (p.15)
- invariably** Constant; not subject to change; without fail (p. 21)
- lashed** Struck as with a whip; made a scathing oral or written attack against (p. 21)
- dubiously** Done or said with doubt or uncertainty; doubtfully; undecidedly (p. 24)
- literally** In a strict sense; word for word (p. 26)
- harrow** A farm implement consisting of a heavy frame with sharp teeth or upright disks, used to break up and even off plowed ground (p. 29)
- laboriously** Accomplished by means of long, hard work (pp. 37 and 82)
- essence** The characteristics or properties by which something can be identified; the most important ingredient (p. 39)
- plummeted** Fell straight down; plunged; declined suddenly and steeply (p. 40)
- surge** To rise and move in a billowing or swelling manner; a sudden forceful flow (p. 47)
- gnarled** Twisted and misshapen; knotty (p. 48)
- primeval** Ancient; having existed from the earliest age or ages (p. 49)
- jutted** Extended outward or upward beyond the main body; projected (p. 49)
- slithered** Glided or slid like a reptile; slipped and slid as on an uneven or loose surface (p. 49)
- sonorous** Having or producing a full, deep, or rich sound (p. 50)
- talons** The claws of a bird of prey (p. 51)
- protruding** Pushed or thrust outward (p. 51)
- peering** To look intently, searchingly, or with difficulty (p. 51)
- inevitably** Impossible to avoid or prevent (p. 54)
- agitated** To cause to move with sudden or violent force; upset; disturbed (p. 55)
- deference** Courteous respect (p. 55)
- lee** The area sheltered from the wind; cover; shelter (p. 57)
- eavesdrop** To listen secretly to the private conversations of others (p. 61)
- domain** The territory over which rule or control is maintained (64)
- densely** Compactly or closely connected; thickly (65)
- abruptly** Suddenly and without warning; unexpectedly rude (p. 70)
- cordial** Friendly; warm and sincere (p. 71)
- radiated** To extend in straight lines from or toward a center; to send out waves or rays (p. 79)
- dignity** The state or quality of being worthy of esteem or respect (p. 79)
- impression** A vague notion, remembrance, or belief; a visible mark made on a surface by pressure; an effect, feeling, or image held as a consequence of experience (p. 80)
- musty** Stale or moldy in odor or taste (p. 81)
- explicit** Fully and clearly expressed; leaving nothing implied (p. 84)
- incomprehensible** Difficult or impossible to understand (p. 85)
- subsiding** Sinking to a lower or normal level (p. 86)
- scrutiny** A close careful study or examination (p. 90)
- recounted** Repeated the facts or particulars of (p. 90)
- sentry** A guard posted at a particular spot to prevent unauthorized entry (p. 93)
- disinterested** Indifferent; not interested (p. 93)

Dictionary Digs

Dig into a dictionary to answer the following questions about words from *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*. Write the letter of the answer in the blank to the left.

- _____ 1. Read the following sentence:
*In **deference** to his Grandmother's wishes, Morgan agreed to spend a week-end with her without televisions or computers.*
How does Morgan feel about his grandmother? He (A) is afraid of her, (B) often argues with her, (C) respects her.
- _____ 2. Is it OK to eat **rancid** food?
(A) Yes. **Rancid** means vitamin-enriched. (B) No. **Rancid** means rotten. (C) It would be OK after it has been washed and cooked.
- _____ 3. **Draught** means *a measured portion, such as a dose of medicine*. The dictionary will tell you that **draught** is also a variation of another word spelled differently but pronounced the same. What is the word?
(A) draft, (B) drought, (C) drapht
- _____ 4. What is the meaning of the word **tedious** in the following sentence?
*With over a thousand pieces to deal with, putting the puzzle together was a **tedious** process.*
(A) challenging and enjoyable, (B) slow and tiresome, (C) practically impossible.
- _____ 5. The word **laboriously** is an adverb. Which of the following words is the **noun** form of the word?
(A) laborious, (B) labor, (C) labored
- _____ 6. If your parents give you **explicit** instructions to be home by noon, what do you have to do?
(A) Be home by noon. Their instructions are clear. (B) Try to be home by one or two o'clock. You're not sure exactly what they meant. (C) Come home in the afternoon.
Explicit means "flexible."
- _____ 7. If the weatherman says a storm is **subsiding**, what's happening?
The storm is (A) forming in a certain area, (B) gathering strength, (C) calming down.
- _____ 8. **Gnarled**, which means *twisted* or *knotty*, is an example of a word with a silent letter. Which of the following three words does **not** have a silent letter?
(A) gnu, (B) pneumonia, (C) nova
- _____ 9. Which of the following words has something to do with noise?
(A) primeval, (B) sonorous, (C) agitated
- _____ 10. In which of the following professions would a **harrow** be a useful tool?
(A) farming, (B) engineering, (C) medical research.
- _____ 11. What is the meaning of the word **literally** in the following sentence?
*Hal bounded into the room, tripped, and **literally** bounced off the wall.*
(A) Hal pretended to hit the wall. (B) Hal really hit the wall and bounced back. (C) For a moment, it looked as if Hal really would hit the wall.
- _____ 12. In 1847 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a long poem that he called **Evangeline**. The first line is "*This is the forest **primeval**.*" What is a **primeval** forest?
(A) one that is very old, having existed from the earliest times, (B) one where there are evil things and beings; a place of hostility, (C) one that is so large and dense there seems to be no beginning or end

Acronyms and Initializations—Words with Secret ID's

Americans love acronyms—**words** formed by combining the first letters or syllables of other words. **Radar**, for example, is an acronym for **radio detecting and ranging**. Initializations—**initials** that are used as **words**-- are also common. The often-ordered **BLT** sandwich is a simple concoction of **bacon**, **lettuce**, and **tomato**.

Here's your chance to learn the true identity of a few acronyms and initializations. Use a dictionary or the internet to find the origin for the following terms. The upsurge of the internet has created a whole new variety of such words. Find **five** electronic secret ID words and write their meanings on the back of this page.

1. **NASA** _____
2. **ASAP** _____
3. **scuba** _____
4. **sonar** _____
5. **VIP** _____
6. **laser** _____
7. **DNA** _____
8. **IQ** _____
9. **ZIP (code)** _____
10. **DJ** _____
11. **CEO** _____
12. **ABC, CBS, and NBC** _____
13. **AWOL** _____
14. **CD** _____
15. **Teflon** _____
16. **NIMH** _____

Short Answer Questions

The Sickness of Timothy Frisby

1. Describe Mrs. Frisby's house and tell where it was.
2. Where was Mrs. Frisby's husband?
3. What time of the year was it when Timothy fell sick?
4. What was the probable source of the winter's supply of corn that Mrs. Frisby found in a stump hole?
5. How did Timothy compare to his three brothers and sisters?
6. Why did Mrs. Frisby decide to go see Mr. Ages?

Mr. Ages

1. On her journey to see Mr. Ages, why did Mrs. Frisby circle the wide farmyard rather than take the direct route past the farmhouse and the barn? How long did it take for her to reach the clearing where Mr. Ages' home was located?
2. What special ability did Mr. Ages have?
3. What was the reason Mrs. Frisby had been to see Mr. Ages once before?
4. What was odd about Mr. Ages?
5. Though Timothy would get better, what special instructions did Mr. Ages give for him?

The Crow and the Cat

1. What did Dragon look like?
2. How did the crow get tied to the fence?
3. How did Mrs. Frisby rescue Jeremy?
4. When Dragon started coming their way, how did Jeremy save himself and Mrs. Frisby?
5. What did Jeremy say to Mrs. Frisby before he flew away?

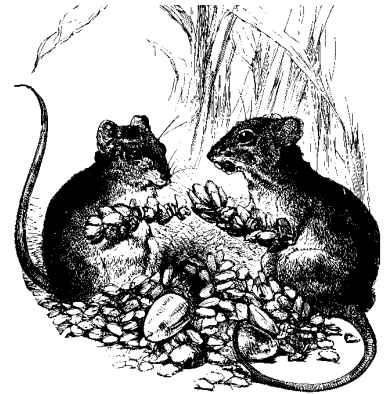
Mr. Fitzgibbon's Plow

1. How did Timothy react to the medicine that Mr. Ages sent?
2. Why was Moving Day necessary for Mrs. Frisby?
3. Why was Mrs. Frisby worried?
4. What did the shrew say about the coming of Mr. Fitzgibbon's plow?
5. What sound frightened Mrs. Frisby?

The Sickness of Timothy Frisby
Pages 3- 11

Write either **True** or **False** in the blank before each statement.

- _____ 1. Mrs. Frisby and her family lived underground in a buried cinder block.
- _____ 2. This story began at the end of winter.
- _____ 3. Mrs. Frisby's house was located on the edge of a forest.
- _____ 4. Mrs. Frisby's house had one large room.
- _____ 5. Mrs. Frisby was a widow mouse with four children.
- _____ 6. The family's pantry was completely empty when Mrs. Frisby went out looking for food.
- _____ 7. There was a thick blanket of snow covering the field and woods.
- _____ 8. In the stump at the edge of the woods, Mrs. Frisby found a winter's supply of food.
- _____ 9. The animal that stored the food in the stump most likely had been killed by a hunter.
- _____ 10. Mrs. Frisby took corn from the stump for her children's breakfast.
- _____ 11. Timothy refused to get out of bed because he was sick.
- _____ 12. Moving Day for Mrs. Frisby's family was at least two months away.
- _____ 13. Timothy had a fever and a terrible stomach-ache.
- _____ 14. Mrs. Frisby thought Timothy was the smartest of her children.
- _____ 15. Timothy's pulse was very weak and barely detectable.
- _____ 16. Normally, Timothy was the healthiest of Mrs. Frisby's children.
- _____ 17. Mrs. Frisby and two of her children brought corn, peanuts, and mushrooms home from the stump.
- _____ 18. While Mrs. Frisby was gone Timothy's condition worsened, and he was gasping for breath.
- _____ 19. Timothy became delirious and didn't know his mother was talking to him.
- _____ 20. Mrs. Frisby knew she would have to go see Mr. Ages to get medicine for Timothy.





Whole Book Test

Mrs. Frisby
Timothy
a brook
Billy Fitzgibbon
Arthur
Mr. Ages
a cinder block
Moving Day
stealing
a white truck
Thorn Mountain
National Forest

Mr. Fitzgibbon
Jeremy the crow
the owl
the rosebush
pneumonia
farming
Jonathan
lee of the stone
Thorn Valley
grain and seeds
powder

Brutus
Nicodemus
Justin
Dragon
NIMH
injections
Jenner
Toy Tinker
Christmas trees
electrocuted

Dr. Schultz
a plow
reading
air ducts
a spool of thread
Boniface Estate
the study
machines
their life spans
cyanide gas

From the list above, choose the word, name, or phrase that fits each of the clues below and write it in the blank. **All** answers will be **used at least once**. **Some** of the answers will be **used more than once**.

- _____ 1. Mrs. Frisby put this in Dragon's food so he would sleep while the rats moved her house.
- _____ 2. He was the farmer who owned the land where the rats and Mrs. Frisby lived.
- _____ 3. The rats spent the winter here after their escape from NIMH.
- _____ 4. The rats discovered how to open their cages by doing this,
- _____ 5. Mrs. Frisby went to see him to get medicine for Timothy.
- _____ 6. He took Mrs. Frisby to see the owl.
- _____ 7. He was the doctor in charge of the experiments at NIMH.

Think, Write, Create

Chapter Activities

The Sickness of Timothy Frisby

In a stump, Mrs. Frisby found food stored by an animal that had somehow lost its life. Knowing this to be the way of nature, Mrs. Frisby felt no remorse, and she was grateful to have found the storehouse at a time when food was at its scarcest.

- How do you characterize the way Nature provided food for Mrs. Frisby's family? Was it a matter of **cruelty** or a matter of **efficiency**? Explain your choice.
 - What happens to a person's possessions when he or she dies? How is the human way of dealing with the situation different from Mother Nature's way?
-

Mr. Ages

One of the dictionary definitions of the word **enigma** is a *baffling or perplexing person or thing; a mystery*.

- In what ways was Mr. Ages an enigma?
- Is there an **enigma** in your own life? Write about it (or him/her).

Mr. Ages had a special knowledge of plants, and he made *draughts and powders that could sometimes save the sick from dying*. Herbal medicine—cures made from plants—has been a part of human history for thousands of years. Interest in herbal cures as part of a healthy lifestyle has returned in recent years.

Choose **four** of the following and use the internet to find out what diseases or conditions they are said to cure or prevent.

green tea

hot peppers

witch-hazel

olive oil

garlic/onion

Echinacea

St. John's Wort

catnip

cinnamon

ginkgo

chamomile

ginseng

Find **two** more herbal remedies that you find interesting and add them to your report.

The Crow and the Cat

To the Fitzgibbon family, Dragon is both a pet and a benefit to the farm. To Mrs. Frisby, Jeremy, and other animals in the area, Dragon is a monster. His nature changes with each *point of view*.

Use **Graphic Organizer #1** to analyze Dragon's personality from both the Fitzgibbon's perspective and the animals' way of thinking. Listed on the left are three Dragon topics—his appearance, his behavior, and his value. On the top line radiating from each topic, write *the animals*. On the second line, write *the Fitzgibbons*.

In the connecting boxes, make notes about how each side feels about the cat.

Write a composition about **The Real Dragon**.

Think, Write, Create

Whole Book Activities

Jeremy said the birds went to the owl when they didn't know what to do. His theory was that the owl didn't sleep in the daytime. He believed the bird sat in the hollow of his tree and thought, at least part of the time, and that was how he knew so much.

- In your opinion, was the owl really wise or was he simply in a position to see more than other animals?
 - How do you suppose owls earned the reputation of being wise? What part of their appearance or behavior might have led people to think of them in this way?
 - Are *wise*, *intelligent*, and *smart* the same thing? Would the owl that Mrs. Frisby went to visit qualify for either title? Explain.
 - Who is someone you consider **wise**? Explain why you think so.
-

The rats had many enemies including Dragon, the men from NIMH, and their own deserters. However, they had techniques for dealing with their enemies.

- What price had the rats paid at the hands (paws) of their enemy Dragon the cat? How did they deal with the danger he posed?
 - One of the goals included in the Plan was for the rats to live without being detected by Nimh. Explain how they intended for it to work.
 - How did Jenner and his followers put the rats in extreme danger?
 - If you could give the rats the benefit of your insight, what other methods would you recommend for dealing with the danger they faced?
-

Prove that Mrs. Frisby was a **courageous** and **intelligent** mouse by writing a composition about the brave and intelligent things she did.

The injections Dr. Schultz forced upon the rats and mice in the laboratory at NIMH greatly increased their intelligence and their life spans.

- What would the world be like if scientists could find a way to make every person a genius? What would be the advantages of such a world? Can you think of any problems that might result from such a change?
 - If the average life span could be increased to 150 years, what do you think people would do with so much time? What changes would have to take place in order for there to be enough food, water, energy, and living space?
-

Martin Frisby hoped to enlist the aid of Jeremy the crow and make a trip to Thorn Valley to see the rats.

- Draw a bird's-eye-view of Thorn Valley after the rats have lived there for a year. Include only those things that you believe could be seen on the surface.
 - Draw a diagram of the underground complex you predict the rats would have built. Use labels to identify the different parts of your drawing.
-

Use objects such as craft sticks, string, paper clips, tacks, buttons, tinker toys, etc, to build a machine or tool that the rats can use. Remember, there is no electricity available. The machine or tool will be powered by rat muscle.

Will the Real Dragon Please Step Forward?

To the Fitzgibbon family, Dragon is both a pet and a benefit to the farm. To Mrs. Frisby, Jeremy, and other animals in the area, Dragon is a monster. His nature changes with each *point of view*.

Use the organizer below to analyze Dragon's personality from both the Fitzgibbon's perspective and the animals' way of thinking. Listed on the left are three Dragon topics—his appearance, his behavior, and his value. On the top line radiating from each topic, write *the animals*. On the second line, write *the Fitzgibbons*. In the connecting boxes, make notes about how each side feels about the cat.

Write a composition about **The Real Dragon**.



Dragon's Appearance

Empty rectangular box for notes.

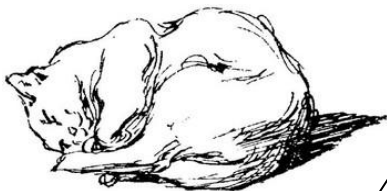
Empty rectangular box for notes.



Dragon's Behavior

Empty rectangular box for notes.

Empty rectangular box for notes.



Dragon's Usefulness

Empty rectangular box for notes.

Empty rectangular box for notes.