



Murphy and Mousetrap

Sylvia Olsen

Interest level: ages 8–11

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AR Quiz # 88790

Consider the following question as you read *Murphy and Mousetrap*:

How can a person learn to overcome the fear of being different?

Story

Murphy's mother has just moved Murphy and their cat, Mousetrap, back to the reserve in Port Alberni. Although his mother is First Nations, Murphy is sure that he won't fit in, and he worries about Mousetrap who has always been an indoor cat. When a bunch of local boys drag Murphy to their soccer practice, put him in goal and pelt him with balls, he believes that his worst fear has come true. But he seems to be discovering a new talent at the same time. And perhaps he has misjudged the kids in his new community. Being a light-skinned city boy thrust onto a reserve far from the city is not easy, but maybe Murphy has what it takes to be accepted.

Author

Sylvia Olsen has many sources of inspiration for her children's writing. Her mother and mother-in-law have more than two hundred grandchildren and great-grandchildren between them! Sylvia is the author of two other Orca Young Readers—*Catching Spring* and *A Different Game*—as well as two Orca Soundings. She lives in North Saanich near Victoria, British Columbia, with her partner Tom, and Jude, their very beautiful and energetic Australian shepherd.

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Connecting to the Curriculum***Language Arts***

- Moving can be stressful. Write an email to Murphy giving him advice on how to make his move as smooth as possible.
- Journal writing: Have students keep a daily journal as though they are one of the following characters: Murphy, Mousetrap, Murphy's mother or Albert. At the end of one week, share and discuss students' entries.
- In chapter 5, Murphy's mom lists six things she wants him to know about growing up on the reserve. Have students elaborate on her points as you write them on a chart or whiteboard. Then have them list six important points about where they live, giving reasons for each. You can tie this in with the social studies lesson on norms, below.
- Write a "found poem" using any page from *Murphy and Mousetrap*. Found or invented poetry is constructed by taking words or phrases cut out from a photocopied page or copied onto slips of paper, and rearranging them into a free-verse poem.
- Students gain a deeper understanding of a text by talking about and questioning what they read. After students read a chapter of *Murphy and Mousetrap*, ask them to write a question that occurred to them as they read the story. For example, in chapter 7: Why doesn't Murphy think his new place feels like home?
- Singly or in pairs, have students create a television ad for the book. Allow time for rehearsal, and then present to the class (or film it!).

Social Studies

- A famous Nuu-chah-nulth leader was Chief Maquinna. Maquinna was a young man when Captain Cook discovered Nootka Sound in 1778. Find out about him and his life on the west coast of British Columbia.
- The Nuu-chah-nulth people were previously known as the Nootka. They settled on the west coast of Vancouver Island in the 1700s. Read about what life was like during this period in history (1778 to 1800).
- Norms are the ways people belonging to a certain group behave. Every culture has its own norms. You could even say school cliques have norms! Many cultures share norms, such as greeting someone who has just arrived or offering food to guests—but sometimes there are big differences between cultures. On Murphy's reserve, people leave their doors unlocked. This is a cultural norm (it's *normal* for that cultural group). On the reserve, people can come and go freely from one another's homes. How do these norms differ from what is done in your culture? How are they similar? What sorts of norms do you have that are unique to your ethnic background?

Art

- In *Murphy and Mousetrap*, Murphy plays in a soccer championship. Design player jerseys for the team. Ask students to explain their choices for what they included on the jerseys. Hang jersey designs on the wall and have students vote for their favorite.
- Art Thompson, Russell Swift, Mike Thompson and Cecil Billy are Nuu-chah-nulth artists. Find out what makes their work unique. Create a piece of art in the style of a Nuu-chah-nulth artist.
- Discuss: how is art useful for passing along stories within a culture?
- Imagine you are *Mousetrap* and draw a sequence of pictures that describes how a cat might feel about moving.

Science

- Provide students with a selection of rocks and mineral samples and have them devise a method for classifying them into groups.
- There are three types of rock: igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary. Have students find out the differences between them and give examples of rocks found in each category. What sorts of rocks can be found in their home area?
- Minerals are pure substances. They are unlike rocks. Rocks may contain minerals, but they are not pure. Bring in a selection of mineral samples for students to observe. Have them list the characteristics that describe the minerals.
- Break students into groups of four to research arrowheads. Assign each member of the group one of the following questions:
 1. What kind of material was preferable for fashioning arrowheads?
 2. Why are arrowheads shaped a certain way?
 3. What sorts of animals did the northwest coast First Nations hunt?
 4. Are these animals still used by coastal First Nations? How has this group's diet expanded to include other foods?

Then re-group the students by the question they answered and have each group present their findings to the rest of the class, jigsaw-style.

Drama

- Have students take on the role of one of the characters from *Murphy and Mousetrap*. Choose a chapter of the book and have them enact the events. For example, in chapter 2, Murphy finds out that his mom has a new job and they will be moving to the reserve.
- *Mousetrap* hides from Murphy, and they make a game out of it. Have students make up a game that involves a maze or a series of events to solve.

Music

- Have students write songs about rocks and minerals using familiar tunes. For example, “Row, Row Your Boat” or “Three Blind Mice.”

Physical Education/Health

- When Murphy makes his third save during his first game on the reserve, he falls over backward and blacks out. He sees stars and hears buzzing noises. As a class, learn about concussions. Discuss how soccer and other team sports can lead to dangerous brain injuries. Break the class into groups and have each group come up with some tips on how to play safe.
- Humans have played organized games for centuries. Every game has rules. Have students find and list the rules for soccer. Can they find out how earlier versions of soccer-like games differ from today’s game? Why is it important for games to have rules?

Connecting to the Text

- Vocabulary and summarizing: Select a number of at-level words and a number of challenging words from *Murphy and Mousetrap*. Give each student a card with one of the vocabulary words on it. Allow a few moments for each child to make up a sentence using the word. Encourage students to concentrate on retelling the part of the story where the word occurs.
- Provide students with a graphic organizer that will guide them in creating a character sketch for one of the novel’s main characters. Have students augment their character sketches by writing a short passage explaining which person in the story this character would most like to spend the day with. Then ask: which character in the story would *students* most like to spend the day with?

- A simile is a comparison using the words *like* or *as*. Similes are often an effective way to show action or mood in a story. Ask students to consider the following simile about how quickly the soccer ball moves during one game on the reserve: “The ball made a direct line in front of him as if it were tied with a string to the end of [Albert’s] shoe.” How does this simile help to create a picture in the reader’s mind? Have students find four more examples of similes in the story. Discuss the importance of dialogue with your students. Read aloud a passage that’s rich in dialogue (try the end of chapter 7). Have students explain how the author’s use of dialogue helps to:
 - ◆ move the story along
 - ◆ tell us more about the characters and their backgrounds
 - ◆ build excitement or generate sympathy for the characters

Invite students to find another selection where the dialogue is strong. Share this with the class. Challenge students to write a conversation between two characters in the story based on what they already know about those characters’ personalities.

- Like plot, setting and characters, theme is also an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It’s not really a moral, but it’s kind of a guiding message all the same. Break your class into small groups and have them discuss what they understand to be the theme of *Murphy and Mousetrap*.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a special pet friend like Murphy does? What makes your friendship with that animal so special?
2. Imagine what it might be like to have your family suddenly go from having only two people in it to having dozens of people in it. Would this feel strange? What would be good about it? What would not be so good about it?
3. Have you ever had a grownup tell you that you were going to love something, even though you didn’t think you would? Did you end up loving it? Or was that grownup totally wrong? Explain.
4. In chapter 5, Murphy has a dream about pulling a cat out of a mud puddle. What does this dream mean? Do your dreams sometimes bring you messages?
5. Murphy likes to collect stones. Do you have special things that you collect? Why do you choose to keep these things?

6. Murphy can't help looking white. He sticks out among all the other First Nations on the reserve. How does this affect the way the other children treat him? Is this fair or not fair? Explain your thinking.
7. Have you ever surprised yourself by being good at something you thought you would stink at? Explain.
8. Why doesn't Murphy tell his mother about how the other boys were trying to hurt him during the first soccer game?
9. On the reserve, people don't lock their doors. What do you think your parents would say if you suggested that you stop locking the doors on your house? How would you feel about the idea? What's nice about it? What's not so nice?
10. By going outside and getting dirty—and enjoying it—Mousetrap teaches Murphy an important lesson about life. What is this lesson?
11. Children at school and on the bus call Murphy names like *whitey* and *honky*. Even though Murphy doesn't know what honky means, he says the word makes him feel bad just by the way it's said. Think about the power our words have to make people feel certain ways. When do words make you feel good? When do they make you feel bad?
12. How does Albert's attitude change toward Murphy by the end of the book? Why does this happen?

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

When I was a teenager (seventeen years old) I got married and moved onto the Tsartlip Indian Reserve, which is a few miles north of Victoria, BC. I raised my children on the reserve. I am not a First Nations person, but my husband was and so are my children. Over the years many children visited my house: friends of my children, relatives and children from the neighborhood. My oldest son, Adam, was a small boy with fair hair and light eyes. On the reserve he stood out as different. He was not as tough as the neighborhood boys and often got into situations that challenged him.

Murphy and Mousetrap is a story about a boy very much like Adam. Murphy is small and fair and moves onto a reserve where there are many bigger, tougher boys. Like Adam, Murphy learns how to cope and even thrive in his new environment. This story is about how Murphy uses all his skills and abilities to turn what he thinks are his weaknesses into his strength. Like Murphy, Adam also learned how to get along even though he was different from the other people in his community.

I bet that almost all of us feel out of place and intimidated sometimes and, just like Murphy, we need to find a way to fit in and not be afraid.

Sylvia Olsen

Resources**Books***Fiction*

- Babbitt, Natalie. *Tuck Everlasting*
 Alma, Ann. *Summer of Changes*
 Armstrong, Luann. *Jeannie and the Gentle Giants* (finding yourself)
 Cannon, Janell. *Pinduli* (mother and child)
 Carter, Anne Laurel. *My Home Bay* (moving)
 Clements, Andrew. *A Week in the Woods*
 Easley, Mary Ann. *Alone in the Ice World* (fitting in to a new place)
 Egielski, Richard. *Slim and Jim* (homelessness and friendship)
 Kelly, Katy. *Lucy Rose, Here's the Thing About Me* (moving, making new friends)
 King, Thomas. *Coyote's New Suit* (fitting in)
 Lee, Jeffrey. *True Blue* (being the new kid)
 Lucado, Max. *If Only I had a Green Nose* (fitting in)
 Lupini, Valerie. *There goes the Neighborhood* (dealing with change)
 Monk, Isabell. *Hope*
 Myers, Laurie. *Surviving Brick Johnson* (getting along)
 Olsen, Sylvia. *Catching Spring*
 Napoli, Donna Jo. *Albert* (each day is special)
 Sheth, Kashmira. *Blue Jasmine* (fitting in)
 Vaughan, Richard Lee. *Eagle Boy: A Pacific Northwest Native Tale*
 Walters, Eric. Orca Young Reader basketball series—ten titles

Nonfiction

- Allen, Judy. *Unexplained: An Encyclopedia of Curious Phenomena, Strange Superstitions, and Ancient Mysteries*
 Hughes, Mary. *Popular Superstitions*
 Llewellyn, Claire. *Kids Survival Handbook*
 Moser, Adolph and David Melton. *Don't Tell a Whopper on Fridays! The Children's Truth Control Book*
 Wiseman, John. *The SAS Survival Guide*
 Black, Martha. *Out of the Mist: Treasures of Nuu-Chah-Nulth Chiefs* (971)
 Brown, Deb Austin. *Growing Character* (372.6)
 Challoner, Jack. *Rocks and Minerals* (552)
 Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* (306.4)
 Christopher, Matt. *On the Field With...Mia Hamm* (796.33)
 Clark, Karin and Jim Gilbert. *Learning by Doing: Northwest Coast Native Indian Art* (704)
 Gallagher, Kelly. *Deeper Reading* (372.4)
 Goldin, Barbara Diamond. *The Girl Who Lived with the Bears* (398.2)
 Hall, Cally. *Gemstones* (553)

Herbst, Dan. *Soccer: How to Play the Game* (796.3)
Hooper, Meredith. *A Pebble in my Pocket: A History of our Earth* (551)
O'Donoghue, Michael. *Rocks and Minerals of the World* (552)
Paterson, Kathy. *Differentiated Learning* (372.6)
Robinson, Michael. *Sea Otter Chiefs* (971.10)
Simon, Seymour. *Cat* (636.8)
Staedter, Tracy. *Rocks and Minerals* (552)

Online

Street Games

www.Artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/2249/

Fast FAQs About Rocks and Fossils

www.childrensmuseum.org/geomysteries/faqs.html

The Educator's Reference Desk: Geology

www.eduref.org/cgi-bin/lessons.cgi/Science/Geology

Rocks for Kids

www.rocksforkids.com

Unicef United States

www.unicefusa.org

The Canadian Encyclopedia: Indian Reserve

www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ART0003980

Aboriginal Place Names in Canada

www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/is/info106-eng.asp

First Nations in Canada

www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/is/info106-eng.asp

BC Archives People of the Northwest Coast

www.bcarchives.gov.bc.ca/exhibits/timemach/galler07/frames/wc_peop.htm