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Mrs. Frisby and the Rats Of NIMH Mini Analysis

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats Of NIMH is a fascinating book that follows a widow mouse named Mrs. Frisby through a set of harrowing tasks in order to keep her family safe, as well as a startling journey of discovery about her late husband and the community of rats that live nearby on Farmer Fitzgibbon's land. A major theme is how Mrs. Frisby spends virtually the entire book being pushed outside her comfort zone, both intellectually and physically. Secondary themes include Mrs. Frisby's desire and attempts to provide safety and security for her children, and being able to conquer fear.

My favorite "fish out of water" story, which has (surprisingly) many similarities, is the 1985 film *Back to the Future*. This film's main character is Marty McFly, a teenager from 1985 with a somewhat dysfunctional family. Marty, through an unlikely situation, finds himself stuck in the year 1955 and must figure out how to work through the culture shock and situations that he is unprepared for in order to fix his situation and return to 1985. A major plot point is that Marty unintentionally puts his own future and the future of his family in danger through his actions.

In order to restore his family's future, as well as his own, Marty must assume the guise of a 1955 teenager and integrate himself into the town's high school life. He learns to dress, speak and act like a 1955 teenager, but frequently makes reference to how strange things are, as compared to what he is used to, thus constantly reinforcing the theme that he is out of his

comfort zone. In the same way, Mrs. Frisby is forced by circumstance to continually do things that she is uncomfortable doing, or that would have previously been done by her husband, such as travel to Mr. Ages' house, speak to the rats, travel and speak to the owl, and sneak into the farmer's house in order to drug the cat. She spends nearly the entire book taking actions that she is uncomfortable with, due to necessity.

A secondary theme that is similar in both is the main character's ability to conquer their own fears. Marty is full of fear and self-doubt due to his family and school difficulties, and questions whether he will be able to accomplish anything big or worthwhile. This is shown early in the movie, when he is talking with his girlfriend after he fails at an audition: "What if they say, 'Get out of here, kid, you got no future.' I mean, I just don't think I can take that kind of rejection." Mrs. Frisby constantly battles her fears of many things, including cats, the outdoors, and her inability to provide for her family, as is evidenced when she is returning from Mr. Ages' house: "... in which case she would end up walking alone in the woods in the dark - a frightening prospect, for at night the forest was alive with danger. " (O'Brien, 20) Regardless, they both need to overcome their fears, and both do so, in the pursuit of the same thing - the happiness of their family.

The final theme that is paralleled is the theme of family. In *Back to the Future*, Marty's primary goal is to reunite his father and mother, and insure that his family continues as it had before. Despite the difficulties he has experienced, his family is a primary influence in his life, and though he is partially acting in a mode of self-preservation, he truly does want his family together. Mrs. Frisby's primary motivation throughout the book is the preservation of her family, especially her youngest child, the sickly Timothy. Her need to go outside, visit Mr. Ages, and

recruit the rats to help are all due to the need to keep her family safe. She is willing to take nearly any risk and push through her own fear in order to make certain that her family is secure.

I think that this book is an incredible classic, because it provides so many topics to talk about with children. It is a great book to introduce to children where the subtext can be discussed and motives of characters can be examined in great depth. The ideas of the rats wanting to have their own community and a sustainable lifestyle, versus their living as thieves and scavengers. The idea that humans can or should experiment on animals. The motives of the varying characters, and why they do what they do are all excellent teaching and discussion points. There are a lot of subplots and ideas that can be viewed in several lights, such as the rats - they claim that they want to live without stealing, but they had little issue with stripping and stealing everything from the truck found in the forest. Ideas like these can be used to show that there are several levels of meaning in this book, and can serve as a foundation for teaching subtext and layered ideas. This book works on many levels, and can be enjoyed on many levels as well, from a simple story of a courageous mouse, to a treatise on inter-race relations, or a subtle commentary on the desire for a utopia.

WORKS CITED:

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