

The Wind in the Willows

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,735

Connections

Writing

Write an article from Rat's perspective on the meaning of friendship. Write a second one from Toad's perspective. Discuss the differences with a partner.

Science

Research ferrets, stoats, and weasels, focusing on their behavior and reputation. Use your research to write an essay explaining why the author chose to use these animals for the role of the enemy.

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The Wind in the Willows

Part 13



Adapted from the Writings of Kenneth Grahame
Illustrated by Christopher Cyr

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The Wind in the Willows



Kenneth Grahame
(1859–1932)

Kenneth Grahame was Scottish, but he spent most of his life in England, where he worked as a banker and wrote in his free time. *The Wind in the Willows* began as stories he told his son, Alastair, before bed.

Adapted from the Writings of Kenneth Grahame
Illustrated by Christopher Cyr

Focus Question

Why does Toad need the help of his friends?

Words to Know

appeased	infamously
chaise	mutinously
contriving	rakishly
evasions	reproachfully
humbugged	simultaneously
ignominiously	subterfuges

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Correlation

LEVEL Z1

Fountas & Pinnell	W–X
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	60

In Part 12 of The Wind in the Willows, Toad steals a motorcar and crashes it into a pond. As he flees the scene once again, he falls into the river, which takes him downstream. When Toad pulls himself from the water, he discovers he is on Rat's doorstep.

XI. "Like Summer Tempests Came His Tears"

The Rat put out a neat little brown paw, gripped Toad firmly, and gave a great hoist and a pull; and the waterlogged Toad came up slowly but surely over the edge of the hole, till at last he stood safe and sound in the hall, streaked with mud and weed to be sure, and with the water streaming off him, but happy and high-spirited as of old, now that he found himself once more in the house of a friend, and dodgings and **evasions** were over, and he could lay aside a disguise that was unworthy of his position and wanted such a lot of living up to.

"O, Ratty!" he cried. "I've been through such times since I saw you last, you can't think! Such trials, such sufferings, and all so nobly borne! Then such escapes, such disguises such **subterfuges**, and all so cleverly planned and carried out! Been in prison—got out of it, of course! Been thrown into a canal—swam ashore! Stole a horse—sold him for a large sum of money!

Humbugged everybody—made 'em all do exactly what I wanted! Oh, I *am* a smart Toad, and no mistake! What do you think my last exploit was? Just hold on till I tell you—"

"Toad," said the Water Rat, gravely and firmly, "you go off upstairs at once, and take off that old cotton rag that looks as if it might formerly have belonged to some washerwoman, and clean yourself thoroughly, and put on some of my clothes, and try and come down looking like a gentleman if you *can*; for a more shabby, bedraggled, disreputable-looking object than you are I never set eyes on in my whole life! Now, stop swaggering and arguing, and be off! I'll have something to say to you later!"

Toad was at first inclined to stop and do some talking back at him. He had had enough of being ordered about when he was in prison, and here was the thing being begun all over again, apparently; and by a Rat, too! However, he caught sight of himself in the looking glass over the hat stand, with the rusty black bonnet perched **rakishly** over one eye, and he changed his mind and went very quickly and humbly upstairs to the Rat's dressing room. There he had a thorough wash and brushup, changed his clothes, and stood for a long time before the glass, contemplating

himself with pride and pleasure, and thinking what utter idiots all the people must have been to have ever mistaken him for one moment for a washerwoman.

By the time he came down again, luncheon was on the table, and very glad Toad was to see it, for he had been through some trying experiences and had taken much hard exercise since the excellent breakfast provided for him by the gipsy. While they ate, Toad told the Rat all his adventures, dwelling chiefly on his own cleverness, and presence of mind in emergencies, and cunning in tight places; and rather making out that he had been having a gay and highly coloured experience. But the more he talked and boasted, the more grave and silent the Rat became.

When at last Toad had talked himself to a standstill, there was silence for a while; and then the Rat said, "Now, Toady, I don't want to give you pain after all you've been through already; but, seriously, don't you see what an awful fool you've been making of yourself? On your own admission you have been handcuffed, imprisoned, starved, chased, terrified out of your life, insulted, jeered at, and **ignominiously** flung into the water—by a woman, too! Where's the amusement in that? Where does the fun come in? And all because

you must needs go and steal a motorcar. You know that you've never had anything but trouble from motorcars from the moment you first set eyes on one. But if you *will* be mixed up with them—as you generally are, five minutes after you've started—why *steal* them? Be a cripple, if you think it's exciting; be a bankrupt, for a change, if you've set your mind on it: but why choose to be a convict? When are you going to be sensible, and think of your friends, and try and be a credit to them? Do you suppose it's any pleasure to me, for instance, to hear animals saying, as I go about, that I'm the chap that keeps company with gaolbirds?"

Now, it was a very comforting point in Toad's character that he was a thoroughly good-hearted animal and never minded being jawed by those who were his real friends. And even when most set upon a thing, he was always able to see the other side of the question. So although, while the Rat was talking so seriously, he kept saying to himself **mutinously**, "But it *was* fun, though! Awful fun!" and making strange suppressed noises inside him, *k-i-ck-ck-ck*, and *poop-p-p*, and other sounds resembling stifled snorts, or the opening of soda-water bottles, yet when the Rat had quite finished, he heaved a deep sigh and

said, very nicely and humbly, "Quite right, Ratty! How *sound* you always are! Yes, I've been a conceited old fool, I can quite see that; but now I'm going to be a good Toad, and not do it anymore. As for motorcars, I've not been at all so keen about them since my last ducking in that river of yours. The fact is, while I was hanging on to the edge of your hole and getting my breath, I had a sudden idea—a really brilliant idea—connected with motorboats—there, there! Don't take on so, old chap, and stamp, and upset things; it was only an idea, and we won't talk anymore about it now. We'll have our coffee and a quiet chat, and then I'm going to stroll quietly down to Toad Hall, and get into clothes of my own, and set things going again on the old lines. I've had enough of adventures. I shall lead a quiet, steady, respectable life, pottering about my property, and improving it, and doing a little landscape gardening at times. There will always be a bit of dinner for my friends when they come to see me; and I shall keep a pony **chaise** to jog about the country in, just as I used to in the good old days, before I got restless, and wanted to *do* things."

"Stroll quietly down to Toad Hall?" cried the Rat, greatly excited. "What are you talking about? Do you mean to say you haven't *heard*?"

"Heard what?" said Toad, turning rather pale. "Go on, Ratty! Quick! Don't spare me! What haven't I heard?"

"Do you mean to tell me," shouted the Rat, thumping with his little fist upon the table, "that you've heard nothing about the Stoats and Weasels?"

"What, the Wild Wooders?" cried Toad, trembling in every limb. "No, not a word! What have they been doing?"

"—And how they've been and taken Toad Hall?" continued the Rat.

Toad leaned his elbows on the table, and his chin on his paws; and a large tear welled up in each of his eyes, overflowed and splashed on the table, *plop! plop!* "Go on, Ratty," he murmured presently; "tell me all. The worst is over. I am an animal again. I can bear it."

"When you—got—into that—that—trouble of yours," said the Rat, slowly and impressively; "I mean, when you—disappeared from society for a time, over that misunderstanding about a— a machine, you know—"

Toad merely nodded.

“Well, it was a good deal talked about down here, naturally,” continued the Rat, “not only along the riverside, but even in the Wild Wood. Animals took sides, as always happens. The River Bankers stuck up for you, and said you had been **infamously** treated, and there was no justice to be had in the land nowadays. But the Wild Wood animals said hard things, and served you right, and it was time this sort of thing was stopped. And they got very cocky, and went about saying you were done for this time! You would never come back again, never, never!”

Toad nodded once more, keeping silence.

“That’s the sort of little beasts they are,” the Rat went on. “But Mole and Badger, they stuck out, through thick and thin, that you would come back again soon, somehow. They didn’t know exactly how, but somehow!”

Toad began to sit up in his chair again, and to smirk a little.

“They argued from history,” continued the Rat. “They said that no criminal laws had ever been known to prevail against cheek and plausibility such as yours, combined with the power of a long purse. So they arranged to move their things in to Toad Hall, and sleep there, and keep it aired, and

have it all ready for you when you turned up. They didn’t guess what was going to happen, of course; still, they had their suspicions of the Wild Wood animals. Now, I come to the most painful and tragic part of my story. One dark night—it was a *very* dark night, and blowing hard, too, and raining simply cats and dogs—a band of weasels, armed to the teeth, crept silently up the carriage drive to the front entrance. **Simultaneously**, a body of desperate ferrets, advancing through the kitchen garden, possessed themselves of the backyard and offices; while a company of skirmishing stoats who stuck at nothing occupied the conservatory and the billiard room, and held the French windows opening onto the lawn.

“The Mole and the Badger were sitting by the fire in the smoking room, telling stories and suspecting nothing, for it wasn’t a night for any animals to be out in, when those bloodthirsty villains broke down the doors and rushed in upon them from every side. They made the best fight they could, but what was the good? They were unarmed, and taken by surprise, and what can two animals do against hundreds? They took and beat them severely with sticks, those two poor, faithful creatures, and turned them out into the

cold and the wet, with many insulting and uncalled-for remarks!”

Here the unfeeling Toad broke into a snigger, and then pulled himself together and tried to look particularly solemn.

“And the Wild Wooders have been living in Toad Hall ever since,” continued the Rat, “and going on simply anyhow! Lying in bed half the day, and breakfast at all hours, and the place in such a mess (I’m told), it’s not fit to be seen! Eating your grub, and drinking your drink, and making bad jokes about you, and singing vulgar songs, about—well, about prisons and magistrates, and policemen; horrid personal songs, with no humour in them. And they’re telling the tradespeople and everybody that they’ve come to stay for good.”

“O, have they!” said Toad getting up and seizing a stick. “I’ll jolly soon see about that!”

“It’s no good, Toad!” called the Rat after him. “You’d better come back and sit down; you’ll only get into trouble.”

But the Toad was off, and there was no holding him. Toad marched rapidly down the road, his stick over his shoulder, fuming and muttering to himself in his anger, till he got near his front gate,

when suddenly there popped up from behind the palings a long yellow ferret with a gun.

“Who comes there?” said the ferret sharply.

“Stuff and nonsense!” said Toad, very angrily. “What do you mean by talking like that to me? Come out of that at once, or I’ll—”

The ferret said never a word, but he brought his gun up to his shoulder. Toad prudently dropped flat in the road, and *bang!* a bullet whistled over his head.

The startled Toad scrambled to his feet and scampered off down the road as hard as he could; and as he ran he heard the ferret laughing and other horrid thin little laughs taking it up and carrying on the sound.

He went back, very crestfallen, and told the Water Rat.

“What did I tell you?” said the Rat. “It’s no good. They’ve got sentries posted, and they are all armed. You must just wait.”

Still, Toad was not inclined to give in all at once. So he got out the boat and set off rowing up the river to where the garden front of Toad Hall came down to the waterside.

Arriving within sight of his old home, he rested on his oars and surveyed the land cautiously. All seemed very peaceful and deserted and quiet. He could see the whole front of Toad Hall glowing in the evening sunshine, the pigeons settling by twos and threes along the straight line of the roof; the garden, a blaze of flowers; the creek that led up to the boathouse, the little wooden bridge that crossed it; all tranquil, uninhabited, apparently waiting for his return. He would try the boathouse first, he thought. Very warily he paddled up to the mouth of the creek, and was just passing under the bridge, when . . .
Crash!

A great stone, dropped from above, smashed through the bottom of the boat. It filled and sank, and Toad found himself struggling in deep water. Looking up, he saw two stoats leaning over the parapet of the bridge and watching him with great glee. "It will be your head next time, Toady!" they called out to him. The indignant Toad swam to shore, while the stoats laughed and laughed, supporting each other, and laughed again, till they nearly had two fits—that is, one fit each, of course.

The Toad retraced his weary way on foot and related his disappointing experiences to the Water Rat once more.

"Well, *what* did I tell you?" said the Rat very crossly. "And, now, look here! See what you've been and done! Lost me my boat that I was so fond of, that's what you've done! And simply ruined that nice suit of clothes that I lent you! Really, Toad, of all the trying animals—I wonder you manage to keep any friends at all!"

The Toad saw at once how wrongly and foolishly he had acted. He admitted his errors and wrongheadedness and made a full apology to Rat for losing his boat and spoiling his clothes. And he wound up by saying, with that frank self-surrender which always disarmed his friends' criticism and won them back to his side, "Ratty! I see that I have been a headstrong and a willful Toad! Henceforth, believe me, I will be humble and submissive, and will take no action without your kind advice and full approval!"

"If that is really so," said the good-natured Rat, already **appeased**, "then my advice to you, considering the lateness of the hour, is to sit down and have your supper, which will be on the table in a minute, and be very patient. For I am convinced that we can do nothing until we have seen the Mole and the Badger, and heard their latest news, and held conference and taken their advice in this difficult matter."

“Oh, ah, yes, of course, the Mole and the Badger,” said Toad, lightly. “What’s become of them, the dear fellows? I had forgotten all about them.”

“Well may you ask!” said the Rat **reproachfully**. “While you were riding about the country in expensive motorcars, and galloping proudly on blood horses, and breakfasting on the fat of the land, those two poor, devoted animals have been camping out in the open, in every sort of weather, living very rough by day and lying very hard by night; watching over your house, patrolling your boundaries, keeping a constant eye on the stoats and the weasels, scheming and planning and **contriving** how to get your property back for you. You don’t deserve to have such true and loyal friends, Toad, you don’t, really. Some day, when it’s too late, you’ll be sorry you didn’t value them more while you had them!”

“I’m an ungrateful beast, I know,” sobbed Toad, shedding bitter tears. “Let me go out and find them, out into the cold, dark night, and share their hardships, and try and prove by— Hold on a bit! Surely I heard the chink of dishes on a tray! Supper’s here at last, hooray! Come on, Ratty!”

Glossary

appeased (<i>v.</i>)	made happy or less upset because of something given or said (p. 14)
chaise (<i>n.</i>)	a vehicle with two wheels that is drawn by a horse (p. 7)
contriving (<i>v.</i>)	forming a clever plan (p. 15)
evasions (<i>n.</i>)	acts of escaping or avoiding something (p. 3)
humbugged (<i>v.</i>)	tricked or deceived someone (p. 4)
ignominiously (<i>adv.</i>)	in a shameful, humiliating, or disgraceful manner (p. 5)
infamously (<i>adv.</i>)	in a manner well-known to be bad, evil, or dangerous (p. 9)
mutinously (<i>adv.</i>)	in a way that goes against orders or expectations (p. 6)
rakishly (<i>adv.</i>)	in a way that makes one appear disreputable or unrespectable (p. 4)
reproachfully (<i>adv.</i>)	in a manner that shows disapproval (p. 15)
simultaneously (<i>adv.</i>)	occurring at the same time (p. 10)
subterfuges (<i>n.</i>)	acts of trickery or deceit used to reach a goal (p. 3)