

Morty and the Twice-Fit Mice

A Reading A-Z Level R Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,104

Connections

Writing

How does Morty change throughout the story? Write a paragraph using details from the text to support your answer.

Health

Keep a log of your activity for a week. Share your log with a partner. Discuss why being active is important to your health.

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Written by Kathy Hoggan • Illustrated by David Opie

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Focus Question

What lesson does Morty learn in the story?

Words to Know

abruptly	challenge
anticipation	inspected
arrogance	smugly
boisterous	squirming
chafed	

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Correlation

LEVEL R

Fountas & Pinnell	N
Reading Recovery	30
DRA	30

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Chapter One

Sweat trickled into Morty's ears, but he kept on climbing. His eyes were fixed on the metal hook that secured the large rope to the gym ceiling. He climbed the final 2 feet (0.6 m) and slapped the hook with his paw, while his classmates cheered from below. Morty slid down proudly, ignoring the throbbing rope burn.

"All third graders that climb to the top two times this month will receive the Twice-Fit Mice Award," Coach Mack announced. "Does anyone else have the guts to give it a try?"

Ben and Fred eagerly raised their paws, and the class watched as they worked their way to the top.

"The gym will be available during recess and after school," Coach Mack said. "You can train until you earn two stars on the chart. If you need any tips, these three can offer some help." He motioned to Morty, Ben, and Fred.

"Good luck, weaklings," Morty muttered, careful not to let Coach Mack hear.

Chapter Two

The next morning Morty's muscles ached and his paws were **chafed**. "I'm not excited to climb that rope again," he grumbled on the way to school.

"Me neither!" Ben agreed. "My arms feel like jelly."

Fred groaned. "At least we don't have to spend more time practicing."

Morty's eyes lit up. "Game on at my house after school. I just got Mega Mouse Avenger!"





During recess, Morty peered in the open gym door to see Marta on the rope, **squirming** in vain as she attempted the climb. Marta was Morty's next-door neighbor.

"Marta!" Morty yelled, "Are those muscles or noodles?"

Ben and Fred cackled at the insult and followed Morty to the soccer field.

Morty, Ben, and Fred never climbed the rope at recess or after school, and they didn't stay to help their classmates train. Instead, they spent their afternoons playing video games.

"I've looked for you in the gym," Marta said to Morty one day during lunch. "Coach said you'd help us with the **challenge**."

"I've been busy," Morty said as he munched on some cheese puffs.

"I just can't do it," Marta complained. "I practice and practice, but I can't reach the top."

"You really haven't gotten any better in the last two weeks?" Morty asked.

Marta shook her head. "I try to climb higher, but I'm scared I'll fall."

"Well, I definitely can't help you," Morty said. "You're just a chicken."

Marta looked hurt. Without saying a word she stood **abruptly**, grabbed her lunch, and went to sit at another table.



Chapter Three

With a week of the challenge remaining, Morty, Ben, and Fred strolled into the gym. Ben **inspected** the Twice-Fit Mice chart. "Some mice have two stars already!" he said.



"I heard that Marta has tried seventeen times and still can't make it," Fred snickered. He grasped the rope and climbed part of the way up, but his face was already bright red. "It's a cinch!" he yelled shakily.



Ben took a turn, too, but stopped before he reached the top. He was panting and wheezing. "Yeah, my baby sister could do this with her eyes closed," he said nervously.

"Not everyone has our Mega Mouse muscles," Morty boasted.

"Well, we'd better get our second climb in for the award," Ben said. Fred nodded in agreement.

Morty rolled his eyes **smugly**. "No big deal. I can wait until the end."

Morty left the gym, but Ben and Fred stayed behind to practice.

Chapter Four

On the final day of the challenge, the gym was packed full of mice. Everyone clapped joyfully when a star was added to the chart.

Fred went first. He began climbing rapidly but slowed halfway up the rope.

“Freddy! Freddy!” the crowd chanted.

Fred was struggling to reach the top, but finally he touched the hook to **boisterous** cheers, and then he crawled down.

“I almost didn’t make it,” he whispered to Morty.

Ben started up next. He was nearing the top when he stopped and looked down. His face was drenched in sweat.

Morty’s hands were clammy. Watching his friends struggle was scaring him. He hadn’t practiced once since his first climb. What if he didn’t make it?

The gym was quiet with **anticipation** as Ben climbed slowly.

When Ben’s paw tapped the hook, Morty saw the relief on his face. Everyone hooted and clapped.

Ben scrambled down and gave Morty a pat on the shoulder. “Good luck,” he said breathlessly.

“Step right up, Morty,” Coach Mack said as he motioned Morty forward.

Morty stepped on the mat and squinted up at the hook, which looked as far away as the moon.

“You’ve got it, Morty,” Fred and Ben encouraged. Morty had done the first climb in no time at all. No one else felt the need to cheer for him.





Morty wiped his sweaty paws on his pants and began climbing. He felt weak, as though every move was a strain. All eyes were on Morty as he inched up the rope at a snail's pace.

Morty's tail was barely off the ground when his paws began to slip. His knees shook with fear. He listened for the insults he deserved, but they didn't come.

"Don't give up, Morty!" It was Marta's sweet voice. "Keep your eye on the goal, and put one paw ahead of the other!"

The others joined in, crying out, "Come on, Morty! You've got it!"

In that moment, Morty knew that these mice were very good sports, and that he was not. They were rooting for him even though he didn't help them train. Morty also knew that he wasn't going to make it to the top. Tears filled his eyes as he stared down at the blurry sea of mice. He loosened his grip and dropped to the mat.

Coach Mack was the first to his side. "Are you injured?" he asked.

Morty blushed and shook his head; the only thing hurt was his pride. "I guess I'm only a once-fit mouse," he said.

The other mice brushed over his failure. "Nice effort, Morty!" they shouted.





Morty wanted to hide, but he knew he had to make up for his **arrogance**.

He approached Marta. "I'm sorry for the way I acted," he admitted. "It was mean of me to make fun of you, and then you cheered me on anyway."

"It's okay, Morty. You can help me get better at soccer to make up for it," Marta said with a smile.

Morty laughed. "Deal," he agreed.

Morty watched Marta and the others try to master the rope climb. He cheered until every last one of them had a chance to be honored as one of the Twice-Fit Mice.

Glossary

abruptly (<i>adv.</i>)	suddenly (p. 8)
anticipation (<i>n.</i>)	the act or feeling of looking forward to something with excitement; expectation (p. 11)
arrogance (<i>n.</i>)	an insulting way of thinking of oneself as better or more important than others (p. 15)
boisterous (<i>adj.</i>)	noisy, excited, and energetic (p. 11)
chafed (<i>adj.</i>)	sore, raw, or damaged from rubbing (p. 6)
challenge (<i>n.</i>)	a test of one's ability to do something (p. 8)
inspected (<i>v.</i>)	checked closely (p. 9)
smugly (<i>adv.</i>)	in a way that shows too much pride in one's self or achievements (p. 10)
squirming (<i>v.</i>)	twisting the body from one side to the other repeatedly (p. 7)