

Activities

• If your classroom has a pet, spend a few minutes brainstorming characteristics of the pet with your class. Ask each student to write a story about it.

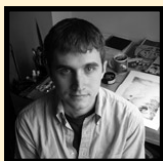
• The author uses many creative and vivid phrases to describe people and events in the story. Miss Barmy, for example, has teeth “like a row of white chisels.” Have your students create their own villains and make a picture of them without drawing—use only exciting language.

• Have each student take a song he knows and change the words to convey an important message, like Rat does with “The Star-Spangled Banner” and “America the Beautiful.”

• Fables are short stories that often feature animals with human characteristics to demonstrate a lesson, or moral. Rats are a favorite animal in fables. Search for a fable or two about rats (consider La Fontaine’s “The Lion and the Rat” or “The Cat and the Old Rat”) and read it to your students. What characteristics do rats show in these fables? Is the Rat in *Emmy* like the rats in the stories? Is this how your students thought of rats before they read the stories?



Lynne Jonell [photo] is the author of several picture books, including *Mommy, Go Away!* and *Bravemole*. She teaches writing at the Loft Literary Center and lives in Plymouth, Minnesota with her husband and family. www.lynnejonell.com



Jonathan Bean [photo] has a master’s degree in illustration from the school of Visual Arts in New York. He has illustrated several books for young readers, including *Mokie and Bik*. He lives in New York City. www.jonathanbean.com



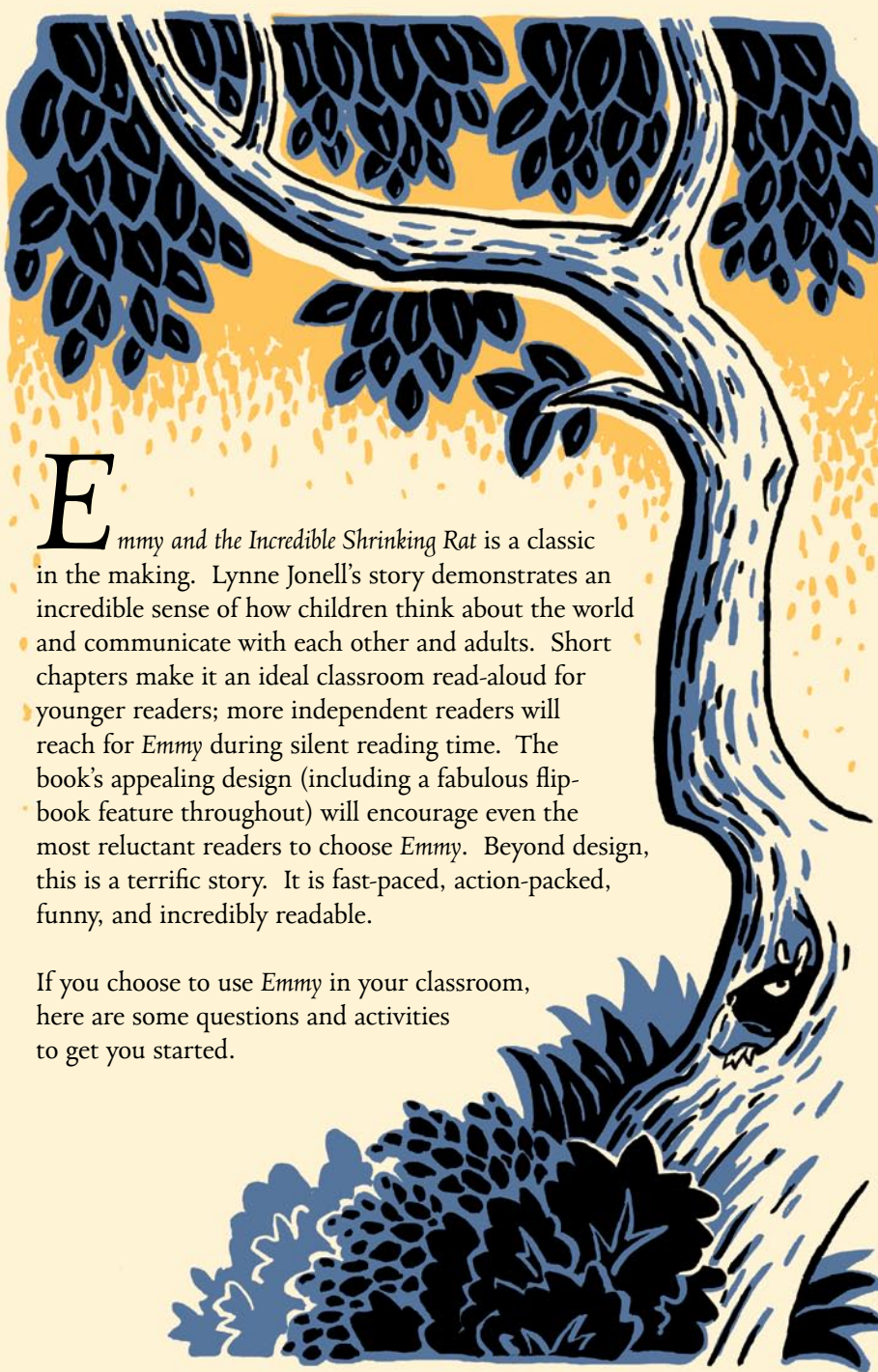
★ “This tale turns smoothly on its fanciful premise and fabulous characters.”

-- Booklist, starred review



Discussion Questions

- Rodents are also favorite characters in children's literature. If your students have read any other books that feature rodent characters (Charlotte's Web or Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, for example), discuss how the rats in those books are similar to or different from Rat. Why do your students think rats are such a popular animal in literature?
- The names of Professor Vole, Miss Barmy, and Professor Capybara are significant in this story. When you begin discussing the book explain what a vole and capybara are and what barmy means. Ask your students what they think the characters who have those names will be like.
- The Rat tells Emmy she should try being mean so that people respect her more. How can a person earn someone's respect without being mean?
- Ask your students: if they could feed one person in the world a cookie imprinted with the chinchilla footprint (to reverse his/her values), who would they choose? Why?
- "Freedom has its bitter side," the Rat says at one point (pg. 61). Ask your students what they think he means, and if they've ever felt that way.
- "I wouldn't mind being ordinary," Emmy says on page 70. Ask your students what they think she means. Follow up by asking if students have ever felt under pressure because of something they're good at and how they felt about it.



Emma and the Incredible Shrinking Rat is a classic in the making. Lynne Jonell's story demonstrates an incredible sense of how children think about the world and communicate with each other and adults. Short chapters make it an ideal classroom read-aloud for younger readers; more independent readers will reach for *Emmy* during silent reading time. The book's appealing design (including a fabulous flip-book feature throughout) will encourage even the most reluctant readers to choose *Emmy*. Beyond design, this is a terrific story. It is fast-paced, action-packed, funny, and incredibly readable.

If you choose to use *Emmy* in your classroom, here are some questions and activities to get you started.