

Wind in the Willows Discussion Outline

1. It is obvious why the story begins as it does: it is spring, and Mole moves out into the world. Why does it end as it does?
2. Although this is a very cheerful book, with many kind people and enjoyable actions, there are also numerous blunders and even examples of bad behavior. What exactly are the misdeeds of Toad? What are the faults of the Wild Wooders (ferrets, weasels and stoats)? What blunders can you think of that are made by "good" characters? For instance, is Ratty's penchant for writing poetry a weakness?
3. Mole, Ratty, Badger, and even Toad each have some specific qualities that make them good companions and admirable people. What are those qualities, and how do they affect the roles the four play in the story. For instance, it is Ratty who is putting together the armament for the friends when they are going to clear out Toad Hall. Would it be equally appropriate for it to be Mole or Badger? Do you think Grahame cheats a little in favor of Mole?
4. Several houses are described in detail: how are they alike, and how and why do they differ? Is Toad Hall shown as a home, as Mole's, Ratty's, and Badger's dwellings are? What about the caravan?
5. Each chapter has at least one visually memorable event. Because these events usually require motion and often evoke other senses besides sight and sound, they often are not illustrated. Choose several chapters in which the climactic scene is not illustrated in your book and explain what you would see, hear, smell, feel, etc. if a multimedia, multisensory "illustration" could be created. Don't forget taste!
6. This is the last book we will read which contains fantastic elements. What are those elements, how do they compare with the elements of fantasy in Alice, Princess and Goblin, Wizard of Oz, Peter Pan? How does it compare to Jungle Books? How do the real world and the fantasy interact in each case. In this book, what would be lost and what could be kept if there were no fantasy--if, for instance, the characters were all people?

The Wind in the Willows

- :1. Chapter One: Pay close attention to the opening (setting, action, character) and to the sequence of actions. What does the writer seem to be affirming here? How do you know? Have you had a similar experience? Look specifically at the words Grahame uses. Is the river significant? How?
2. Chapter Two: Contrast Toad's irresponsibility here with what Mole has done in the first chapter. Note how Mole seizes the oars and tries to row the boat, only to upset the whole thing. Where are they going? Are the value judgments any different in this chapter?

3. Page 29. Mole would desert his commitment to Toad in order to make Ratty feel good. But Rat knows that they have made a promise to Toad. He, however, is very much committed to his home. Is this also connected to his sense of responsibility? The country lay bare and entirely leafless around him, and he thought that he had never seen so far and so intimately into the insides of things as on that winter day when Nature was deep in her annual slumber and seemed to have kicked the clothes off. . . . He had got down to the bare bones of it, and they were fine and strong and simple" (41-2).

4. After a most poetical interlude, Mole decides to head for the Wild Wood. right place for the right person, the blending of natures. As opposed to what? For this is the last best gift that the kindly demigod is careful to bestow on those to whom he has revealed himself in their helping: the gift of forgetfulness (126-27).

5. How does this connect to our view of Badger and his home (77)? How does Mole's process differ from the processes attributed to human beings in this passage? Within the context of the story, do their values represent current values?

6. Look carefully at the concluding paragraph on page 74. Why is it important?

7. There is a resolution to home conflict. What is it that makes the home sweet, the same home that was duty and boredom in the beginning?

8. What does "Song Dream" mean?

9. Why does Otter return to the same place on the river back to wait for Portly? (118)

10. 127. The gift of forgetfulness? How can forgetfulness be a gift? Why is it a blessing to them to forget what they have seen?

11. 130 The song. How can it be found again? Here we have a writer writing about a writer of poetry? This is always important? Ask yourself, so what? What's the big deal?

12. What are wayfarers? Are we all wayfarers?

13. On page 153 we see Nature's Grand Hotel. Consider the conservative nature of Ratty. Rats stay put while other species migrate (Remember when Mole went to the wild wood and Rat stayed home). Is this part of nature lore which Grahame wished to impart? Rats do travel; birds migrate. What does this mean beyond the fact that animals migrate?

14. 170. The South awaits you. There is still time to follow me. Indeed you will follow me. And most importantly the way to handle the fact that one has missed out, or that one cannot have what one wanted in life. What does this suggest? The function of art and creativity.

15. The fame of the four with the inhabitants of the wild wood. Note that it had very little to do with the reality of the characters, but what something the parents had created to control the children. Is Grahame making a comment?

16. Consider Toad. Select any passage where the author shows Toad up to his tricks. Note how Grahame handles the material to give pleasure without, at the same time, granting approval. Discuss the passage. Find polarities.

17. What does the wind symbolize? Grahame titled the book, The Wind in the willows. Why wind? Why not the animals?

Discuss. As he hurried along, eagerly anticipating the moment when he would be at home again among the things he knew and liked, the Mole saw clearly that he was an animal of tilled field and hedgerow, linked to the ploughed furrow, the frequented pasture, the lane of evening lingerings, the cultivated garden-plot. For others the asperities, the stubborn endurance, or the clash of actual conflict, that went with Nature in the rough; he must be wise, must keep to the pleasant places in which his lines were laid and which held adventure enough, in their way, to last for a lifetime.

ORAL AND WRITTEN CHAPTER QUESTIONS FOR THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

CHAPTER ONE: "RIVERBANK FRIENDS"

1. Talk about animal personification. (Animals taking on human characteristics) What other books can you name that use this?
2. Mole seems to always be full of questions. Why do you think that is?
3. Where was Mole's home? Above or below ground?
4. Mole talks about being impolite. (Ex.-never ask why) He claims that this is correct "animal etiquette." Look for and give examples throughout the book.

CHAPTER TWO: "MR. TOAD OF TOAD HALL"

1. *What does responsibility mean?
2. *Who was not acting responsibly on the adventure?
3. What happened to Toad's wagon?
4. How did the accident change him?
5. Do you think Toad will be happy with his car? Why or why not?
6. Remind students that this is the first of many adventures in the novel. Keep reviewing what they are.

CHAPTER THREE: "THE TERROR OF THE WILD WOOD"

1. Mole was "imagining" things in the Wild Wood. What does this mean?
2. *Is the Wild Wood a happy place or a scary place? Why or why not?
3. Re-read the description of the Wild Wood. How does this description make you feel? (Adjective tie-in)

CHAPTER FOUR: "LOST IN THE STORM"

1. How was Rat being a good friend?
2. *Have you ever been a good friend? How?
3. What clues helped them to find Badger's house?

CHAPTER FIVE: "MR. BADGER"

1. Where are badger and Mole's homes? Where are Rat and Toad's homes? Compare the differences.
2. What adventures have the characters experienced so far?
3. How do you picture Badger's home?
4. *What kind of a friend is Badger?
5. *Do you have any friends like Badger? What are they like?

CHAPTER SIX: "FROM ONE PRISON TO ANOTHER"

1. Do you have a friend like Toad that you take care of? If so, who are they and how do you take care of them?
2. *Have you ever told a lie? What happened?
3. What do you think will happen to Toad?

CHAPTER SEVEN: "A HARE-BRAINED ESCAPE?"

1. What would you do if you were Toad? Why?
2. Toad uses a disguise to escape. Can you think of other disguises?
3. Will Toad be able to go home? Why or why not?

CHAPTER EIGHT: "TOAD'S ADVENTURES"

1. What do we know about Toad?
2. What do you think of him?
3. Why do you think his friends still like him?
4. Do you think he's learned his lesson now? Why or why not?
5. *Review all of the adventures. Who do you think has had the best adventure? Why or why not?

CHAPTER NINE: "NO HOME TO COME HOME TO"

1. What did Mole do that was so clever?
2. Does Toad deserve to have his house back? Why or why not?

CHAPTER TEN: "A CHANGED TOAD"

1. Do you think Toad really changed? Why or why not?
2. *What was your favorite part of the book? Why?
3. *Who was your favorite character? Why?
4. *What part of the book did you like the least? Why?
5. *Which character did you like the least? Why?

NOTE: An * indicates these should be written questions

Background Information

Lesson Three: Review of Chapter One: Mole gets tired of cleaning so he decided to venture above ground.

He goes to the Riverbank where he meets Rat. They spend a wonderful day on the river and meet Otter during their picnic. Mole decides to spend the summer living with Rat along the river.

Lesson Four: Review of Chapter Two: Rat and Mole go to visit Toad at Toad Hall who has just purchased a gypsy wagon. He invited Rat and Mole to go on an adventure with him and they agree. While on their journey a car speeds by – scaring Toad's horse and causing the wagon to crash into a ditch. Toad decides to buy a motorcar.

Lesson Five: Review of Chapter Three: Mole decides he wants to meet Badger, but Rat says Badger will come when he wants. Mole did not want to wait so he leaves for the Wild Wood by himself. Darkness came and he got scared and cold. He hid in a birch tree.

Lesson Six: Review of Chapter Four: Rat discovered Mole was missing and found his footprints leading into the Wild Wood, so decided to go after him. He found him in the birch tree, but Mole still needed to rest.

When they tried to leave they were caught in a snowstorm. While trying to make it through the snow, Mole hurt his leg on what ended up to be Badger's door-scraper. They had found his house. (They had to dig in the snow to get underground)

A badger prefers the grasslands but will live in grassy areas or pastures. Badger's live in a burrow, which has a mouth of about one foot. They burrow in hard ground. Many badgers can be found throughout Illinois.

Lesson Seven: Review of Chapter Five: Badger invited Rat and Mole inside, gave them dry clothes and filled their bellies with food. They all discussed the fact that they needed to help Toad, but decided that it must wait until spring. They slept over and ate breakfast. Otter came to the door to find Rat and Mole since they had disappeared. Badger took them through a secret passageway in his house, which brought them to the edge of the Wild Wood.

Explain to students that a jury is a group of citizens that are chosen to decide if someone is guilty or innocent based on the facts that are presented to them by the lawyers.

Lesson Eight: Review of Chapter Six: Spring has come and Badger pays a visit to Rat and Mole. They go to Toad's house to try to stop his reckless behavior. After Badger speaks with Toad, he won't apologize for his mistakes so they lock him up in his room. Toad tricks Rat by saying he's very sick and sneaks out of the house.

Toad sees a motorcar and steals it. He ends up going to prison to serve a twenty-year sentence.

Lesson Nine: Review of Chapter Seven: The jailor's daughter felt bad for Toad so she befriended him. She devises a plan for Toad to escape by disguising himself as the washerwoman, and he gets free. He reaches the train station and realizes that he has no money to buy a ticket. He begins to cry and an engine driver feels sorry for him and gives him a ride. Soon the police are chasing them. The engine driver tells him to jump off into the woods and he escapes once again. He falls asleep in the woods.

Lesson Ten: Review of Chapter Eight: Toad continues on his journey to get back to Toad Hall and runs into a woman on a barge in the river. She offers to let him come along if he washes, which he knows nothing about. She calls his bluff and angrily kicks him off the barge. In return, he steals her horse and takes off through the woods where he meets a gypsy. The gypsy offers to buy his horse, feed him, and point him in the direction of home. To Toad's luck, he runs into the very same motorcar he had stolen! He gets a ride, convinces them to let

him drive, wrecks the car, and runs away again. The police find him once again, but he trips and falls into the

river. Just when he thought he would drown, Toad rescued him.

Lesson Eleven: Review of Chapter Nine: Toad went into Rat's house to dry off and change clothes. Toad

promised to be good and wanted to go to Toad Hall. Rat told him that it had been taken over by the Stoats,

Weasels, and Ferrets. The friends devised a plan to sneak in and regain control of Toad's house. Mole made it

easier to accomplish by tricking the Stoats.