

Novel Resource (#2)

## Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat

By:Lynne Jonell

Henry Holt and Company, LLC 2007

<http://www.lynnejonell.com>



### **About the Author:**

Lynne Jonell was born in Little Falls, Minnesota, and grew up in a suburb of Minneapolis with two sisters and a brother. Her father was a pastor and her mother a piano teacher. It was in sixth grade, when Lynne became inspired to write books. Lynne has a loving husband and two sons and lives and writes in Plymouth, Minnesota. Lynne teaches writing at the Loft Literary Center. When Lynn is not writing she likes to sail and eat chocolate. Lynne Jonell is the author of *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*, *Emmy and the Home for Troubled Girls*. She has also written several picture books *Mommy Go Away!*, *I Need A Snake*, *It's My Birthday, Too!*, *Let's Play Rough*, *Mom Pie*, *When Mommy Was Mad*, and *Bravemole*. She is currently working on another middle-grade fantasy, *The Secret of Zoom*, to be published in the fall of 2009.

**Honors:**

2008 Smithsonian Notable Book

2008 Junior Library Guild Selection

2008 Minnesota Book Award for Children's Literature

2007 Best Books of school Library Journal

2007 Booklist Editors' Choice

2007 Starred review, Publishers Weekly

2003 Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Platinum Award

1999 Booklist Editor's Choice

1999 Starred review, School Library Journal

1999 Rave Reviews, Sesame Street Parents

1999 IRA-CBC Children's Choice List

1999 Bank Street College Best Children's Books of the Year

1998 Best Books of 1998, School Library Journal

1998 Bank Street College Best Children's Books of the Year

1997 Pointer, Kirkus Reviews

1997 Starred review, Horn Book

1997 One of the top rated for 1997

**Genre:** Fiction/fantasy

**Point of view:** Omniscient 3<sup>rd</sup> person

**Theme:** There is more than one theme in this novel. The first theme is feeling unimportant and “invisible” to everyone around you. Another theme is that we can find comfort and friendship in all creatures, not only humans. My interpretation of the title Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat is that Emmy found “incredible” qualities in such a small creature that could help her find order in her chaotic life.

Annotation:

Emmy tries hard to be good, but no one seems to notice – except for the sarcastic classroom rat who later befriends her. In fact, Emmy’s parents stop caring about her, and the kids at school seem to hardly know she exists. As Emmy’s relationship with the Rat develops, several things become clear – including why her nanny Miss Barmy is forcing her to eat and drink strange things. I think Jonell does a really nice job with helping the reader clearly understand the relationship between Emmy and the other characters to this point.

When Emmy makes friends with the class Rat she begins to realize that she’s not invisible. She also realizes that she’s in the midst of a mystery. Jonell uses a great deal of humor here in the novel to allow the reader understand Emmy as she begins to figure out the mysterious explanation for other people’s failure to notice her.

As Emmy makes friends, she gains confidence in herself, her abilities and in her worthiness of her parents love. With Joe Benson and the Rat at her side, she discovers the value and

necessity of friendship: “Friends are people who help when things go wrong; but Miss Barmy had wanted her to be alone, without any help at all.”

Jonell creates a world filled with rodents, mystery, and danger through which her hero Emmy must find order, to survive. Finally, with the nasty nanny, the sarcastic rodent and the dark plot that twists and turns, Emmy is able to overcome it all and her life returns back to what she thinks is very typical.

**Conflict:**

There are several conflicts in this novel. The first one is **Internal-** Emmy constantly struggling and questioning herself as to why her parents and peers don't know she exists.

**External-** Emmy challenging Miss Barmy from getting her parents to leave and from making her eat/drink the rat's magical potions.

**Internal-** Emmy struggled with sacrificing the Endear Mouse to save her parents.

**Conflict Resolution:**

Once Emmy realizes that it is her nanny, Miss Barmy poisoning her peers, parents and everyone around her, she discovers that everyone really does notice her, and that her parents love her dearly. Throughout the story she is able to find alternate solutions to her problems. For example, instead of sacrificing the Endear Mouse by sticking the needle through his tender heart, she turns to her friends, the professor rat colony to help her.

## **Characters:**

Emmy- Emmy is a very well mannered 10 year old girl. She is an exceptional student who longs for love and friendship. She is the main character.

Miss Barmy- Emmy's nanny. Sneaky, deceitful and negative. She creates conflict for Emmy and leaves her to believe that her parents do not love her.

Mr. Herbifore-The wealthy uncle that dies and leaves the Addison's his fortune.

Raston Rat-The class pet that speaks to Emmy throughout the story and becomes her dear friend and confidant.

Professor Capybara- Professor of rodentology, that studied the rats and their powers. He was nice and helps Emmy and the others figure out the powers and how to change Joe back to normal.

Brian-A homely teenager that ran his uncles

Joe Benson- A ten year old helpful and loyal boy. Joe is Emmy's classmate and dear friend.

Dr. Leander- Emmy's psychologist that Miss Barmy has forced her to see.

Mr. And Mrs. Addison- Emmy's parents are inherently loving and caring, however, once under Miss Barmy's spell they only care about their fortune and traveling around the world. It is as if they don't have a daughter.

Professor/Cheswick Vole- owner of the "Antique Rat" and Brian's Uncle.

Endear mouse, Wishing mouse, and Piebald rat and Chinchilla- these characters all live at the Antique Rat and have magical powers.

Mrs. Brecksniff-Emmy's housekeeper and the cousin of Miss Barmy. She is very kind to Emmy but never stands up to Miss Barmy.

**Setting-** The story takes place in a multitude of places including;

- Emmy's classroom
- The Addison mansion (Emmy's house)
- The Antique Rat

**Interest Level:** 8-12 years

**Reading Level:** 4-6<sup>th</sup> grade

**Booktalk:** Emmy Addison is a ten year old girl that has become invisible to her parents ever since they inherited a large sum of money. They leave her in the care of a mean and deceitful nanny, Miss Barmy. At school, Emmy's teacher and classmates ignore her. There is no one for her to talk to. But when the class pet rat bites her, she is able to understand everything he says. The rat tells Emmy she is "too" good and tries to convince her to be mean. He also bites Joe, one of the popular kids in her class, and they soon discover that a second bite will make them the same size as the rat!

Emmy begins to wonder what is really going on when she walks into the Antique Rat and learns that the evil Miss Barmy is after her family fortune. Emmy sets out on an adventure with her new animal friends to destroy Miss Barmy's plan and to regain her parents love.

**Discussion questions:**

**Pre-Reading-**Emmy was always doing her best work and never getting recognized for it. Why was she never noticed at school? How would it feel to never be noticed?

**Post-Reading-**What could Emmy have done differently to make herself get noticed?

**Pre-Reading-** 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?

**Post-Reading-** What advice does Emmy take from the Rat?

**Pre-Reading-** Miss Barmy isn't very kind to Emmy. What could she do to change how Miss Barmy treats her?

**Post-Reading-** Why does Emmy choose to disobey Miss Barmy in this chapter?

**Pre-Reading-** If Miss Barmy's character were kind and caring, how would that change the story?

**Post-Reading-** Brainstorm a list of good and bad qualities a person that has cared for you had. What quality did you like least and why?

**Pre-Reading-** If you could make tags that had special powers for your friends, what powers would you give them?

**Post-Reading-** Is it ever important to possess a bad quality/power?

**Pre-Reading-** Being able to talk to animals is a common theme in books. What would you like to talk to animals about?

**Post-Reading-** Why do you suppose the author made it so Emmy could talk to the animals of The Antique Rat?

**Pre-Reading-** The rodents in Antique Rat all have different abilities. Which do you think is the most useful and why?

**Post-Reading-** List some qualities in Raston Rat that Emmy likes.

**Pre-Reading-** “Freedom has its bitter side,” the Rat says at one point (pg. 61). What do you think he means?

**Post-Reading-** Create a list of the pros and cons of animals living in captivity vs. in the wild.

**Pre-Reading-** Joe shrinks down to the size of the rats in this chapter. Why doesn't Joe ever worry about getting back to normal size?

**Post-Reading-** Why doesn't Emmy just tell Joe's parents that he has shrank from the rats powers?

**Pre-Reading-** If you could feed one person in the world a cookie imprinted with the chinchilla footprint (to reverse his/her values), who would you choose? Why?

**Post-Reading-** Do you think Emmy would like her parents better if they stopped traveling? In what ways?

**Pre-Reading-** Emmy wants to be an ordinary girl. What is it about Emmy that makes her anything but ordinary?

**Post-Reading-** What is the ONE thing Kathy Addison feels makes her family different from all others?

**Pre-Reading-** Have you had experiences where you felt unacknowledged by the people around you? Have you ever had the sensation of shrinking because of it?

**Post Reading-** Write a story to go along with your journey of what it would be like and what would happen while you were the size of a rat.

**Pre-Reading-** Have you ever lost touch with someone you cared a great deal about? What did/can you do to re- connect with that person?

**Post Reading-** How did Raston Rat feel when he found out he

had a sister that was taken away?

**Pre Reading-** Emmy and Joe think Miss Barmy could have been a model because she was so beautiful. They also think she is ugly. How can this be?

**Post Reading-** What is meant by the expression “things are not always as they seem?”

**Pre Reading-** Have you ever felt under pressure because of something you are good at?

**Post Reading-** How does Brian Help Emmy in this chapter?

**Pre Reading-** Have you ever done something that you thought was really great, just to find out you did it wrong

**Post Reading-** What did Raston do in this chapter that he later found out that he did it wrong?

**Pre Reading-** Have you ever had to sacrifice something you wanted so badly for a good reason? What was it?

**Post Reading-** Do you think Emmy made the right choice to save the Endear Rat and come up with an alternate plan? Why?

**Pre Reading-** Have you ever felt like someone else had control over you by influencing the decisions you made? In what way?

**Post Reading-** Come up with a list of things you could say to that person to let them know you don't like it, while remaining calm and polite.

**Pre Reading-** Do you relate more to Emmy or the Rat, and why?

**Post Reading-** When Raston Rat finished singing his song, why didn't the audience find it bizarre that a rat could sing?

**Pre Reading-** If one of your friends came up missing what could you do to help find them?

**Post Reading-** Why did Joes parents no longer care about him playing soccer anymore?

**Pre Reading-** What is the story saying about good versus bad?

**Post Reading-** Discuss the ways in which the following characters are good and/or bad: Emmy, the Rat, Miss Barmy, P and Emmy's parents.

**Pre Reading-** Is it possible to be "too good?"

**Post Reading-** Describe in 1 paragraph what this person would be like.

**Pre Reading-** Does the development of Emmy and the Rat's relationship remind you of any of your own relationships?

**Post Reading-** What would you have done differently in that relationship to make it have an outcome like Rats and Emmys?

**Pre Reading-** Why did the author choose to call the rat "the Rat" rather than name him something else?

**Post Reading-** Why do we call people nicknames instead of just using their names?

**Pre Reading-** Rodents are often characters in children's literature. Why do you think rats are such a popular animal in children's literature?

**Post Reading-** Brainstorm a list of books that use rats in the story.

**Language:**

Resignedly (p.7)-patiently

Contemptuous (p.7)-arrogant, snobby

Incredulous (p.18) - unbelieving

Exasperated (p.53) - aggravated

Clambered (p.154) - climb or scale up something

Mutations (p.193)-transformation

**Indiana Academic Standards:**

English/ Reading: 4.3.3, 4.3.7, 4.3.6, 4.3.7

\_\_\_\_\_ 5.3.2, 5.3.1, 5.3.3,

6.2.3, 6.2.8,

**Anticipation Guide:**

Before		<u>Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat</u>	After	
Agree	Disagree	It is possible for someone to be too good.	Agree	Disagree
		Others cannot control what we think and do.		
		Good vs. bad, Good always prevails.		
		What you see is not ALWAYS what you get!		
		We can never relate to what an animal is feeling.		

### **Read Aloud Passage:**

1: Chapter 1, p 1-2, Talks about Emmy's parents traveling all the time and never missing her. Her nanny tells her that if she were only better behaved, a better student, and less clumsy, her parents would love her and stop leaving.

2: Chapter 19, p. 238 in this passage, Emmy has to decide to stick the needle through Endear Mouse's heart. She makes her decision not to do it and begins working on another plan.

### **If You Like Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat, You'll Love.....**

Emmy And The Home For Troubled Girls, by: Lynne Jonell  
This is the sequel to Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat, also written by Lynne Jonell. In this sequel an ordinary girl with a nanny that is now a rat believes she can't do much harm. Suddenly five girls turn up missing. Could it be Miss Barmy?

The Incredible Shrinking Teacher, by: Lisa Passen

A teacher planning a wonderful, end of the year party for her students begins to shrink after a cooking accident. With the help of her students, she is able to return back to normal.

### **Curriculum Connections and Book Activities:**

#### Music Connection:

Have each student take a song he/she knows and Change the words to convey an important message, like Rat does with "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "America the Beautiful."

Materials Needed: Paper, Pencils, and a copy of song titles.

#### Language Arts Connection:

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 the students create their own villains and make a picture of them without drawing—use only exciting language.

Materials Needed: Paper, pencils and possibly a thesaurus as a reference.

Science Connection:

This would be a group done by the entire class. If your classroom does not already have a class pet, consider getting a pet rat for the students to be responsible for. Generate a chart for jobs that need to be done each day

Materials needed: Responsibility Chart, markers, cage, rat food, rat toys.

**Bibliography:**

1. <http://www.flipkart.com/>
2. <http://toocoolbooks.blogspot.com/2007/10/emmy-and-incredible-shrinking-rat-by.html>
3. <http://www.lynnejonell.com>
4. <http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome.html>