

YHBA Novel Resource

**Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat**

**By: Lynne Jonell**

**Henry Holt and Company, New York  
2007**

About the Author

**AUTHOR'S HOMEPAGE:**



<http://www.lynnejonell.com/>

Lynne was born in Little Falls, Minnesota, and grew up in a suburb of Minneapolis with two sisters and a brother. As the daughter of a pastor, she was supposed to be good. As the daughter of a piano teacher, she was supposed to practice. According to her, she rarely managed to live up to both these expectations at the same time.

She enjoys sailing, gets very enthusiastic about odd things for short periods of time. She describes her husband as patient and loving. Lynne is the mother of two sons who are in college. She lives and writes in Plymouth, Minnesota in a house on a hill. She enjoys looking out her window into the branches of trees, and down at the neighborhood children who come to slide in the winter. Lynne claims this is good for inspiration and also lets her pretend she is thinking hard, when half the time she is just staring out the window and wondering how soon she can decently give up and go eat some chocolate.

Lynne Jonell is a picture book author who has leapt into middle-grade fiction for reasons unknown. While she does not particularly care for rodents and hasn't managed to shrink for a good ten years, she still holds out hope for future change. She teaches writing at the Loft Literary Center. She is currently working on another middle-grade fantasy, *The Secret of Zoom*, to be published in the fall of 2009.

## PUBLISHED WORK:

***Emmy & the Home for Troubled Girls***, Henry Holt, 2008  
Australian/New Zealand edition, 2009 by Random House Australia

***Emmy & the Incredible Shrinking Rat***, Henry Holt, 2007  
Australian/New Zealand edition, 2008 by Random House Australia  
Audio book, 2009 by Full Cast Audio

***Bravemole***, illus. by the author, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2002

***When Mommy Was Mad***, illus. by Petra Mathers, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2002  
Korean edition, 2003 by Born Publishing, Seoul  
Chinese edition, 2006 by Children's Publications Co., Taipei

***Mom Pie***, illus. by Petra Mathers, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2001

***Let's Play Rough!***, illus. by Ted Rand, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2000

***It's My Birthday, Too!***, illus. by Petra Mathers, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1999  
Chinese edition, 2006 by Children's Publications Co., Taipei

***I Need a Snake***, illus. by Petra Mathers, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1998  
Korean edition, 2003 by Born Publishing, Seoul  
Chinese edition, 2006 by Children's Publications Co., Taipei

***Mommy Go Away!***, illus. by Petra Mathers, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1997  
French edition, 1998 by Kaleidoscope, France  
German edition, 1998 by Carlsen Verlag, Hamburg  
Japanese edition, 1998 by Tokuma Shoten Co., Ltd., Tokyo  
Hebrew edition, 1999 by Ma'ariv Book Guild, Israel  
Korean edition, 2002 by Woongjin Co., Seoul  
Chinese edition, 2006 by Children's Publications Co., Taipei

## AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS:

***Emmy & the Home*** *Smithsonian* Notable Book  
***for Troubled Girls*** Junior Library Guild Selection

***Emmy & the*** Minnesota Book Award for Children's Literature, 2008  
***Incredible Shrinking Rat*** Best Books of 2007, *School Library Journal*  
*Booklist* Editors' Choice  
Starred review, *Publishers Weekly*

***Bravemole*** Oppenheim Toy Portfolio Platinum Award, 2003  
***It's My Birthday, Too!*** *Booklist* Editor's Choice  
Starred review, *School Library Journal*  
Rave Reviews, Sesame Street Parents  
IRA-CBC Children's Choice List  
Bank Street College Best Children's Books of the Year

***I Need a Snake*** Best Books of 1998, *School Library Journal*  
Bank Street College Best Children's Books of the Year

***Mommy Go Away!*** *Pointer*, *Kirkus Reviews*  
Starred review, *Horn Book*

One of the top rated for 1997

## Annotation

*Emmy 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. When Emmy discovers that she and her formerly loving parents are being drugged by their evil nanny with rodent potions that can change people in frightening ways, she and some new friends must try everything possible to return things to normal.

This book is a fast-paced, action-packed, and funny story. The fantasy of talking animals and shrinking humans give it a magical feel. The author does an excellent job with describing characters and events. The exciting, adventurous, and humorous feel of this book would interest intermediate readers. *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat* is a good book to use in lessons dealing with rodents, fantasy and magic. Short chapters make it an ideal classroom read-aloud for younger readers and more independent readers will reach for *Emmy* during silent reading time. This is a terrific story and an enjoyable read.

## Genre

Fiction/Fantasy/Adventure

## Point of View

Third Person

## Theme

There are a couple of themes in this novel. One theme involves friendship. Another theme regards value of what should be important to us; people vs. expensive things and trips. The book title is straight forward: *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat* is a story about a girl named Emmy and a rat that shrinks.

## Conflict

There are many conflicts in this novel: Emmy vs. Miss Barmy, Emmy vs. Rat, Emmy vs. Prof Vole, Emmy vs. her parents. The overall conflict is that Miss Barmy is trying to take over the Addison family fortune.

## Conflict Resolution

What Emmy has done to resolve the conflict was to go on an adventure with her new found friends to find the cure and to save her parents. In the end, Emmy and her friends turn Miss Barmy into a rat and they find the potion for her parents in time before they leave on their trip to London.

## Characters

**Emmy/Emmaline Addison** – Main character, 11 years old, obedient, curious, intelligent  
**Ratty/Ratson/the Rat** – Becomes fast friends with Emmy, witty, timid at times  
**Joe** – 11 years old, Emmy’s classmate, becomes close friends with Emmy, athletic, funny  
**Miss Barmy** – Emmy’s nanny, mean, evil, trying to get rid of parents and Emmy so she can claim the Addison family fortune  
**Mrs. Brecksniff** – Miss Barmy’s assistant  
**Maggie**- Housekeeping staff  
**Mom/Kathy Addison** – Emmy’s mother, loving, caring when potion wears off; sophisticated, uppity when potion is in effect  
**Dad/Jim Addison** – Emmy’s father, loving, caring when potion wears off; businessman, worldly when potion in effect  
**Mr. Herbifore** – Emmy’s teacher at Grayson Lake Elementary  
**Dr.Leander** – Emmy’s psychologist at the school  
**Professor Chesswick Vole** – Villain who rents rodent potions to people for high price, former lab assistant, but calls himself professor  
**Brian** – Professor Vole’s nephew, teenager, friendly, helpful  
**Professor Capybara** – Good professor who was shrunk and caged by Vole who was his lab assistant years before  
**Buck & Chippy** – chipmunks  
**Mrs. Bunjee** – chipmunk’s mother  
**Buckram & Chopster** – rodents in underground city  
**Sissy** – Ratty’s sister  
**Endear Mouse**- mouse in the Antique Rat Shop who can make people realize true values in life  
**Muffy** – Miss Barmy’s cat  
**Mr. & Mrs. Bee** – Miss Barmy’s parents, live near the Antique Rat shop

## Setting

Grayson Lake

## Interest level and reading level

Intermediate readers - 8 to 12 year olds

## Booktalk

Emmy was a good girl. At least she tried very hard to be good. She did her homework without being told. She ate all her vegetables, even the slimy ones. And she never talked back to her nanny, Miss Barmy, although it was almost impossible to keep quiet, some days. She really was a little too good, which is why she liked to sit by the Rat. The Rat was not good at all. . .

When Emmy discovers that she and her formerly loving parents are being drugged by their evil nanny with rodent potions that can change people in frightening ways, she and some new friends must try everything possible to return things to normal. Follow Emmy on this wonderfully exciting adventure as she races against the clock to try to save her parents and from losing them forever.

## Discussion Questions

### Chapter 1

**Pre-reading:** How would you feel if no one noticed you?

**Post-reading:** Rat tells Emmy she should try being mean so that people will respect her more. How can a person earn someone's respect without being mean?

### Chapter 2

**Pre-reading:** Why do you think Joe notices Emmy all of a sudden when he never did before?

**Post-reading:** Why do you think Emmy and Joe are the only ones who can hear the rat speak? Do you think it's a good idea for Emmy to go into the alley?

### Chapter 3

**Pre-reading:** Emmy is usually good. Why do you think she's all of sudden skipping ballet class? What do you think she may find in the alley?

**Post-reading:** When Miss Barmy enters the Antique Rat store and asks for the "usual," what do you think she is asking for?

### Chapter 4

**Pre-reading:** Explain to students what a vole is: a small rodent resembling a mouse, but with a stouter body, a shorter hairy tail, a slightly rounder head, and smaller ears and eyes. You will be introduced to a new character in this chapter, Mr. Chesswick Vole. What do you think he will be like?

**Post-reading:** Emmy has always been a good girl. Why do you think Emmy released the rat from the classroom cage?

### Chapter 5

**Pre-reading:** Have you ever felt under pressure because of something you're good at? How did it make you feel?

**Post-reading:** On page 61, Rat says, "Freedom has its bitter side." What do you think Rat means by this? Have you ever felt this way?

### Chapter 6

**Pre-reading:** If Emmy chooses to take Ratty to school, do you think it's a good idea?

**Post-reading:** What do you think your teacher would do if someone came into the classroom acting like Professor Vole did? How do you think the Rat was feeling during the classroom outburst? How was Emmy feeling? How was Joe feeling? And what about the teacher, Mr. Herbifore, how was he feeling?

### Chapter 7

**Pre-reading:** Do you think Professor Vole will find the rat?

**Post-reading:** How does Joe save Emmy from getting caught with the Rat? Why do you think he does this?

### Chapter 8

**Pre-reading:** Do you think Emmy needs to see a psychologist? Why?

**Post-reading:** Do you think Joe is happy or unhappy about shrinking? Why?

## Chapter 9

**Pre-reading:** Do you think Professor Vole will be blamed for the disappearance of Joe?

**Post-reading:** What does Brian deliver to Miss Barmy? What do you think she may do with this delivery?

## Chapter 10

**Pre-reading:** Emmy and Miss Barmy have the impression that Emmy's parents don't care for her much. Are you surprised by the parent's reaction to seeing Emmy? Do you think their happiness to seeing Emmy will last?

**Post-reading:** Emmy's parents seem very loving and happy to see her. Why do you think they are not the characters Miss Barmy and Emmy have described: self-absorbed and uncaring of their child?

## Chapter 11

**Pre-reading:** What do you think the chinchilla footprint will do if you eat it?

**Post-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?

## Chapter 12

**Pre-reading:** Why do you think Miss Barmy is trying to feed Emmy's parents a chinchilla footprint? What are her motives? Why didn't Joe and Emmy shrink when they were first bitten by the rat?

**Post-reading:** Who do you think the familiar girl is on the news that was in the same class as Professor Vole?

## Chapter 13

**Pre-reading:** Do you think it is a good idea to sneak out of the house at night? What kinds of things could happen to you? Do you think Emmy will run into danger when she sneaks out?

**Post-reading:** How would it make you feel if one of your parents came to your classroom on a regular basis when you were out of the class? Why do you think Miss Barmy is doing this to Emmy?

## Chapter 14

**Pre-reading:** What kinds of things would you like to do if you could shrink to the size of a rat?

**Post-reading:** Do you think Emmy will want to stay shrunk? Would you want to stay shrunk?

## Chapter 15

**Pre-reading:** Explain to students what a Capybara is: the world's largest rodent with slightly webbed feet and no tail. They are related to chinchillas and guinea pigs. You will be introduced to a new character in this chapter, Professor Capybara. What do you think he will be like?

**Post-reading:** How do you suppose the rodents built the underground city?

## Chapter 16

**Pre-reading:** How do you think Emmy, Joe and Professor Capybara will get back to normal size?

**Post-reading:** Endear Mouse's tag reads, "Makes the absent heart grow fonder." What do you think this rodent's special powers are? How will she administer these powers?

## Chapter 17

**Pre-reading:** Thus far, Ratty has bitten by accident. Do you think Ratty will bite anyone on purpose to shrink them?

**Post-reading:** What do you think the potion given to Miss Barmy is going to do to her?

### Chapter 18

**Pre-reading:** What do you think these underground rodents do for fun?

**Post-reading:** How do you think Emmy feels now that she knows what the chinchilla paw prints do to her parents? Do you think she is relieved, happy, sad, excited?

### Chapter 19

**Pre-reading:** This is one of my favorite chapters. I laughed out loud and I think the students will really get a kick out of it. What do you think will happen to Miss Barmy when she uses the rodent potion Brian gives her?

**Post-reading:** Why do you think Professor Copybara is eager to come to the party? Do you think he can help Emmy in some way save herself and her parents?

### Chapter 20

**Pre-reading:** Emmy comes up with a good idea in this chapter. What could it be?

**Post-reading:** Why do you think Emmy remembers the photo of Grandfather Addison in the stairwell?

### Chapter 21

**Pre-reading:** Explain inference to students. Do you think there will be danger at the party?

**Post-reading:** Do you think Emmy is feeling sorry for Miss Barmy? Do you think Emmy should take a chance of sacrificing Endear Mouse to change her parent's feelings for her? Would you do it? What do you think Miss Barmy wants to do with the aging potion?

### Chapter 22

**Pre-reading:** We know Miss Barmy is wanting to get rid of Emmy, but why do you think the psychologist wants to Emmy taken to a troubled girls' home?

**Post-reading:** Why do you think the psychologist comes to Emmy's house? What could be in the milk shake Miss Barmy makes for Emmy?

### Chapter 23

**Pre-reading:** Do you think Miss Barmy will continue to be nice?

**Post-reading:** Do you think Emmy's parents will send her away to the trouble home for girls? Why does Emmy and her friends shrink and tie up Miss Barmy?

### Chapter 24

**Pre-reading:** If you could ride an animal either as your normal size or shrunk to the size of a rodent, what would it be? Why?

**Post-reading:** Do you think Emmy and others will leave Miss Barmy as a rat or change her back?

### Chapter 25

**Pre-reading:** Do you think Emmy and others work good as a team?

**Post-reading:** Why don't the kisses from Sissy turn Miss Barmy back into a human? What does Professor Copybara do to reverse Emmy's parents back to their normal, loving selves?

### Chapter 26

**Pre-reading:** Is there anything left open that we may still discover in this last chapter?

**Post-reading:** What was your favorite part of the story?

## Language/Vocabulary

**Quavered** pg 6: to shake tremulously  
**Bewildered** pg 8: to confuse or befuddle  
**Fiercely** pg 10: having a savage and violent nature  
**Inoculum** pg 11: substance used in inoculation: material injected into a person or animal to create resistance to a disease  
**Reflexology** pg 11: is the practice of massaging, squeezing, or pushing on parts of the feet,  
**Indignantly** pg 14: expressing strong displeasure at something  
**Indistinct** pg 17: not clearly or sharply delineated  
**Incredulous** pg 18: skeptical, disbelieving, in shock  
**Stifled** pg 20: to suppress/repress, as sobs  
**Exorbitant** pg 35: unreasonably high or large  
**Memoir** pg 39: written account of a person's experiences  
**Stealthy** pg 59: secret movement/behavior  
**Catapult** pg 164: launch  
**Cocklebur** pg 164: flowering plants  
**Baritone** pg 250: male voice higher than bass, lower than tenor  
**Blossomed** pg 257: to prosper or thrive  
**Appalled** pg 269: filled with horror/shock  
**Looming** pg 295: to appear or com in view  
**Hunkering** pg 205: act of aggressive  
**Wretched** pg 320: profoundly unhappy  
**Flourish** pg 327: to grow/thrive  
**Grudgingly** pg 330: reluctant/unwilling  
**Agility** pg 330: move quickly  
**Vivid** pg 337: lively spirit, see clearly  
**Gilded** pg 339: to give a pleasing appearance  
**Spasmodically** pg 341: sudden action

## Indiana Academic Standards

English/Language Arts - 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.7

Science - 3.4, 4.4, 5.4

Fine Arts: Music – 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4

Fine Arts: Visual Arts – 3.6, 4.6, 5.6

## Anticipation Statements

<b>BEFORE <u>Agree</u></b>	<b>BEFORE <u>Disagree</u></b>	<b>Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat By: Lynne Jonell</b>	<b>AFTER <u>Agree</u></b>	<b>AFTER <u>Disagree</u></b>
		A person can earn respect by being mean.		
		Rats are a popular animal in literature.		
		Freedom can be bitter.		
		Sometimes being good at something can add pressure.		
		Rats are interesting creatures.		

## Read-Aloud

Chapter 6, pages 78-81 – Emmy has taken the classroom pet rat, which she had set free the previous day, back to school with her. It must remain hidden inside her backpack until school is released. Professor Vole, the evil rat man who wants the classroom rat because of its special powers, is looking for Emmy and the rat.

This passage was chosen because of its exciting and frightening nature. It provoked emotion when I originally read it, which I thought the students would enjoy. After completing the book, this particular part of the story was one I remember the most.

Chapter 19, pages 242-245 - Emmy is eves dropping on Miss Barmy, her evil nanny, and housekeeping staff on her way to the kitchen to get a snack. She realizes very quickly which potion has been given to her nanny. Brian has given Miss Barmy, her evil nanny, a potion that makes her have terrible stinky gas every time she tells a lie.

This passage was chosen because of the humorous nature. It made me laugh out loud when I read it. The terrible, stinky gas is something the intermediate grade level of students would find funny, which could make them enjoy and want to read the story.

## Read-Alike

If you liked *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*, you may also like...

*Abel's Island* by William Steig

*Ace, the Very Important Pig* by Dick King-Smith

*Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White

*Cricket in Times Square* by George Selden

*Emmy and the Home of Troubled Girls* by Lynne Jonell

*I, Freddy*: book one in the golden hamster saga by Dietlof Reiche

All of these books are about animals on an adventure. The books fall into the fantasy genre, include friendships and some magic. Most of these books' characters include a rodent or two or more. In *Ace, the Very Important Pig*, the story is about a special pig that is clever which may remind readers of some of the rodent characters in *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*. *Emmy and the Home of Trouble Girls* is a sequel to *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat* with most of the same characters. This is reason enough for readers who enjoyed the first story to want to continue with the sequel. *Cricket in Times Square* is a fun, adventurous book that has many animal characters like Emmy/Shrinking Rat. The *I, Freddy* book is about an intelligent rodent, a hamster, which escapes captivity similar to Ratty in Emmy/Shrinking Rat story. *Charlotte's Web* displays a theme of friendship as the animals try to save the pig similar to Emmy trying to save her family. *Able's Island* is about a castaway mouse on an island just trying to survive and return home. This character encounters some of the same adventures as do the characters in *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*.

## Across the Curriculum

### MUSIC

#### Activity:

In groups, students will create a poem/song to a popular familiar tune like Ratty did in chapter 21 with his song to the *Star Spangled Banner*. Each group will sing their songs to the class and be judged like American Idol.

#### Supplies:

Musical instruments supplied by music department (optional)

Microphone/PA system

Score cards

Pen/pencil

Paper

#### Indiana Academic Standards:

Fine Arts: Music – 3.1, 3.2, 3.4; 4.1, 4.2, 4.4; 5.1, 5.2, 5.4

English/Language Arts – 3.4, 3.5, 3.7; 4.4, 4.5, 4.7; 5.4, 5.5, 5.7

## Across the Curriculum (cont.)

### WRITING

#### Activity:

Individually, students will write a story in first person as themselves being shrunk to the size of a rodent on an adventure: either playing with their toys, lost in their back yard or traveling to a big city. Students will include a draw a picture to go with their story. The piece will go through the writing process, must be descriptive and adventurous.

#### Supplies:

Pen/pencil  
Paper  
Crayons/markers

#### Indiana Academic Standards

English/Language Arts - 3.4, 3.5, 3.7; 4.4, 4.5, 4.7; 5.4, 5.5, 5.7

Fine Arts: Visual Arts - 3.6, 4.6, 5.6

## Book Activities

Activity #1 – Different/Similar – Students will compare rats from other stories to the rat in *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*

#### Indiana Academic Standards:

English/Language Arts: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7; 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7; 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.7

#### Procedures:

- 1) If have not already read *Charlotte's Web* aloud to class yet, do so before this activity.
- 2) Students will be comparing/contrasting the rats from each story.
- 3) Have students find a partner.
- 4) Using notebook paper and pen/pencils, one student will concentrate on listing similarities of the two rats while the other student will come up with differences of the two rats.
- 5) They will need to list 10 characteristics of each difference and similarity in order of greatest difference/similarity being #1 and the least difference/similarity being #10.
- 6) Each set of partners will share their work with the class.

#### Evaluation:

- 1) Students will be evaluated on listing at least 10 similarities and 10 differences.
- 2) List must be in arranged in order of greatest to least.
- 3) Work must be free from spelling errors.

Activity #2 – Descriptive piece – Students will create their own villain and make a picture of them without drawing, but by using only written words.

Indiana Academic Standards:

English/Language Arts: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.7; 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7; 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.7

Procedures:

- 1) Discussion with students about how the author is very creative as she uses vivid words to describe characters and events in the story. Give an example: Miss Barmy has teeth like a row of white chisels.
- 2) Put students into groups and ask them to go through the story to find descriptive passages and phrases.
- 3) Each group will share their findings with the class.
- 4) Assign students to create their own individual villains and write a descriptive paragraph about their villain. Explain they are making a picture of their villain without drawing, but by using descriptive, exciting words only.
- 5) Following the activity, students will read their paragraph's aloud to the class.
- 6) Reinforce the use of proper grammar, punctuation and capital letters.

Evaluation:

- 4) Students will be evaluated on the use of creative words and how visual they can paint a picture with only words.
- 5) Work must be free from grammatical and spelling errors.
- 6) Presentation of work, must be loud, clear, and exciting.

## Bibliography

Author's website – Lynne Jonell

<http://www.lynnejonell.com/>

Booktalks

<http://www.booktalks.org/>

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<http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/>

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<http://dc.doe.in.gov/Standards/AcademicStandards/index.shtml>

Indianapolis Marion County Public Library

<http://www.imcpl.org/>

Jonell, Lynne. Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007

L530 Course Website

<http://www.lesliepreddy.com/YHBA/yhba%20index.htm>

Online Writing Lab

[http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r\\_evalsource4.html](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_evalsource4.html)

Publisher's website - Henry Holt and Company

<http://us.macmillan.com/HenryHolt.aspx>