

The Tale of Despereaux

Recommended for Grades 4-7

Book Summary: The Tale of Despereaux

Despereaux is a very small mouse with very large ears. He is considered an oddity among other mice because he is not frightened of humans and doesn't want to scavenge for crumbs the way other mice do. Instead, he spends his time discovering music, light, and fairy tales.

When the Mouse Council hears that Despereaux revealed himself to a human, they decide to send him to the dungeon. This would normally be a terrible thing because the dungeon is full of dangerous rats. However, Despereaux is lucky that the dungeon keeper decides to put Despereaux under his care and protection.

Chiaroscuro (Roscuero) is a rat who doesn't want to have to hid in the darkness. He want to be in the light. But when he accidentally causes the death of the queen, he finds himself in big trouble. The king is so upset, that he bans rats from the kingdom. This leads Roscuero to kidnap the princess with the help of a maid. They place Princess Pea in the dungeon.

[SPOILER] Despereaux rescues Princess Pea, who forgives Roscuero and allows him to live in the lighted castle if he wishes. Despereaux is considered a hero and becomes Princess Pea's good friend.

Author Biography: Kate DiCamillo

Kate DiCamillo was born on March 25, 1964 in Philadelphia. As a young child, she suffered from chronic pneumonia, causing her family to move to Florida when she was five years old. She attended the University of Florida, where she majored in English. Kate moved to Minnesota after graduation. She worked in a book warehouse for several years before publishing her first book, *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2000). She presently lives and works in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where she faithfully writes two pages a day.



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Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the fairy tale book inspires Despereaux so much? Do you have any favorite books that inspire you?
2. Despereaux shows great courage, even though he is small, weak, and afraid. Do you know anyone else – either in this book or elsewhere – who shows or has shown great courage?
3. In what ways are Despereaux and Roscuro similar? What makes them different from each other?
4. Despereaux and Roscuro both love light. However, Roscuro tries to take the light for himself, while Despereaux sees light as a gift. What are the results of their actions? Who did the right thing?
5. Despereaux's family treats him terribly... They basically lead him to his death. Do you think Despereaux is right to forgive them? Why or why not? Would you be able to forgive someone who did something that terrible to you?
6. Why does the king ban soup and spoons? Do you think this is the right reaction? Why or why not?
7. Do you think Miggory Sow is a bad person? Why or why not?
8. Princess Pea manages to get Miggory Sow to change her mind about keeping her in the dungeon by asking her what she wants. Why is this such a powerful question? Could this work in real life?
9. Princess Pea forgives Roscuro. Do you think he should have been forgiven? Why or why not? Can he ever be trusted again?
10. In this story, we are told that 'Stories are light'. What do you think this means? Why is light important?



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