

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Children's Literature Winner - 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

CATEGORY SPONSORED BY XCEL ENERGY

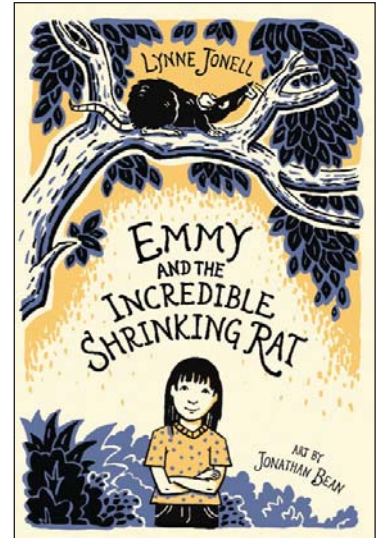
***Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat* by Lynne Jonell**

Henry Holt and Company

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Emmy tries hard to be good, but no one seems to notice – except for the rather sarcastic classroom Rat. 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 the strangest things.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's themes?
 2. Do you relate more to Emmy or the Rat, and why?
 3. Have you had experiences where you felt unacknowledged by the people around you? Have you ever had the sensation of shrinking?
 4. What is the story saying about good versus bad? Discuss the ways in which the following characters are good and/or bad: Emmy, the Rat, Joe, Miss Barmy, Professor Vole, and Emmy's parents. Is it possible to be "too good?"
 5. Does the development of Emmy and the Rat's relationship remind you of any of your own relationships?
 6. What did you find most intriguing about the Antique Rat and Rodent City? Do these locations remind you of other real or imaginary places?
 7. Which of Emmy's relationships is most alarming? Who are her true friends?
 8. What are the biggest surprises in the plot?
 9. Do you think writing dialogue for animals such as rodents is more difficult than writing dialogue for humans, and if so, why?
 10. Why did the author choose to call the rat "the Rat" rather than name him something else?
 11. The author has written the sequel to *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*. What are your predictions for developments and resolutions in the sequel?
-

A CONVERSATION WITH LYNNE JONELL:

Q. What inspired you to write *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*?

Strangely enough, this book began when I woke up one morning with a dream of a piece of green paper with a curved line. Curious about this, I drew the line on green paper, and it turned into the stem of a plant. The drawing seemed to need more, so I added a miniature girl beneath the bottom leaves. She was looking behind her so I drew a red wagon for her to pull. The wagon was empty, and suddenly I knew I had to fill it with a Rat. And then this caption came to my mind: "I might die," said the Rat, "and then they'll be sorry." "They're sorry now," said Emmy. "Not sorry enough," said the Rat. I knew there had to be a story there, so I wrote both backwards and forwards from that point!

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

I did long and painstaking research into the far reaches of my subterranean mind - an unnerving task.

Q. How long did it take you to write *Emmy*?

From the initial dream, to holding the published book in my hands, took about nine years.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing this book?

While the image of the girl pulling the Rat in the wagon was strong enough to propel me into writing the book, I knew it was not the beginning of the story. Something had happened before. My challenge was to figure out what, and go on from there. Another big challenge was that the first draft was about twice as long as it needed to be. I cut 60,000 words from my first draft to make the book the right length; and that's why there's a sequel!

Q. What do you hope readers take away from your book?

I think every child will take something different away from the story, depending on who they are and what grabs them the most. For my part, I just want to sweep them along into another world where they can battle injustice, enlist the help of unlikely friends, and win out in the end.

Q. What do you like most about this book?

I like that I finally managed to write a character-driven novel! Oh, and I also like that it's funny on several levels. I had a LOT of fun coming up with certain names, acronyms, songs, and bits of dialogue that still crack me up.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

It was in sixth grade, when my sister handed me a copy of *A Wrinkle in Time*, that the desire to write really solidified. When I finished the book, I read the last chapter again, because I couldn't bear for it to be over. And when I finished it a second time, I looked for the name of the author. It was Madeleine L'Engle. As I gazed at her name on the cover, I realized that what I wanted to do most of all was to write books just like that for kids just like me.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

I love to sail, I love to wander and have adventures (and get lost!), and lately I've been playing the piano a lot.

ABOUT LYNNE JONELL:

Lynne Jonell is a picture and middle-grade book author who was born in Little Falls, Minnesota and grew up in a suburb of Minneapolis. She teaches writing at the Loft Literary Center and lives in Plymouth. Lynne has a husband, two grown sons, and a slightly battered sailboat. While she does not particularly care for rodents and hasn't managed to shrink for a good ten years, Lynne still holds out hope for future change.



For additional information about the author, the sequel to her award-winning book (*Emmy and the Home for Troubled Girls*, published by Henry Holt and Company, September 2008), and her other work, visit www.lynnjonell.com/.



The Minnesota Book Awards is a statewide outreach program of The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library in partnership with the Office of the Mayor of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Public Library. Visit us online at www.thefriends.org.

Reading guide production supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership, and a lifetime of learning; and the Minnesota Department of Education/State Library Agency, with funding under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA).

