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# Meet the Author

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Kate DiCamillo



As a girl, Kate DiCamillo always loved to read. Among her favourite books were *The Secret Garden*, *The Yearling* and *Twenty-One Balloons*.

For a while Kate hoped to become a vet, but she changed her mind as she grew older. During her university years, she began to focus more on writing. She graduated with a degree in English, and one of her first jobs was at Disney World. She also worked at a children's camp.

Kate found employment in a children's book shop. Influenced by what she read, she began to write her own stories. Her first novel, *Because of Winn Dixie*, was based on her own experience. "I was lonely and couldn't afford to go home. It was the first time I didn't have a dog," she explained. The story's main character, Opal, is a lonely girl who adopts a

dog named Winn Dixie. Kate's first effort in writing a novel earned her a Newbery Honour Award in 2001.

The author's second book, *The Tiger Rising*, was published in March 2001. This novel was deemed an American National Book Award Finalist and received other honours as well. *The Tale of Despereaux*, a novel about a brave mouse who falls in love with a princess, earned Kate the 2004 Newbery Medal. Kate wrote the book for the son of one of her friends. "He wanted a story about an unlikely hero," she recalled. It took her three years to complete the novel and honour his request.

Kate looks ahead to writing more children's novels. She described her method: "I'm at the mercy of whatever character comes into my head. Every day I get up and write two pages and only two pages. It's an easy goal that I know I can do, whether I am working on a novel or not." Kate enjoys answering mail from her young readers and describes it as "thrilling" when a kid writes to her.



# The Tale of Despereaux

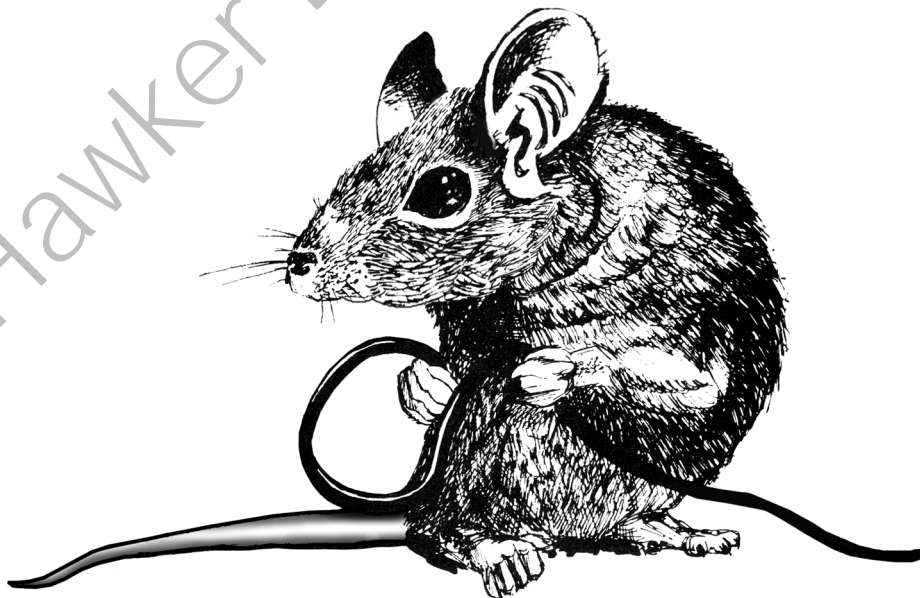
Written by Kate DiCamillo

## STORY SUMMARY

In a little nook in a castle a mouse is born, the only survivor of a litter. The mouse differs from other mice in several ways: he is born with his eyes open; he is very small—even for a mouse; and he has very large ears! His mother names him Despereaux because of the despair and sorrow that surround her. In addition to his physical differences, Despereaux is unlike most mice in other ways as well. He does not behave like other mice and does not share their interests. The other mice, including members of his own family, find it difficult to accept him.

Left on his own, Despereaux wanders the castle unaware of the rules of mouse behaviour. In his wanderings he discovers reading and music and makes contact with humans. In fact, he falls in love with the Princess Pea. Because these activities are against mouse rules, Despereaux is brought to trial before the Mouse Council. He is found guilty and sentenced to die in the dungeons of the castle.

Sadly, Despereaux finds himself betrayed by his family and separated from his lovely princess. In the darkness of the dungeon, he remembers the words of a story he read; it was about a princess and a brave knight who saves her. He holds onto these words throughout his adventures to provide comfort in the belief that all will end well and that he and the princess will live happily ever after.



# Pre-Reading Activity

## Castles

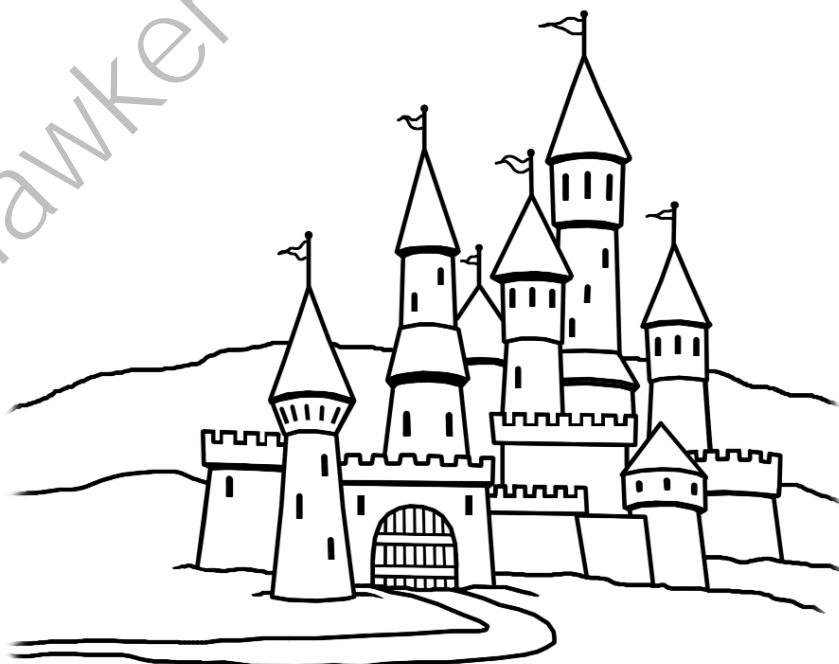
The characters in *The Tale of Despereaux* live in a castle. Castles were built as fortresses during the Middle Ages by kings, lords and other members of the nobility. Although castles provided protection, they were dark, drafty places.

The great hall was the most important room in the castle. It was the centre of castle life. Inside the room there was very little furniture. For the most part, people sat on wooden benches, although there were also a few high-backed chairs. Trestle tables were used for dining, and tapestries lined the walls. The lord or king of the castle and his knights ate in the great hall. They also drank and played games like checkers and chess. At times, a travelling minstrel, or troubadour, would provide entertainment.

Next to the great hall was the king's private room, called the solar. The solar contained the master bedchamber. The king's servants also slept there so that they could assist him in various ways. The solar had a warmer atmosphere than most other rooms in the castle. The second floor of the tower contained a number of sleeping chambers for guests, knights and household helpers. The castle also contained an armoury, where lances, bows, arrows, swords, chain mail, and other types of weapons and armour were kept.

Choose one of the following cooperative-learning activities:

1. With your cooperative-learning group, learn five more facts about castles in general or about a particular castle.
2. With your cooperative-learning group, compare and contrast castles and palaces.
3. With your cooperative-learning group, create a diagram of a castle, labelling its parts.



# Spotlight Literary Skill

## Cause and Effect

Sometimes a certain event or action brings about another event or action. This is what is meant by cause and effect.

### EXAMPLES

**Despereaux's ears were very large, so everyone made fun of him.** The first part of the statement, "Despereaux's ears were very large," is the cause. "Everyone made fun of him" is the effect. In other words, it was the fact that his ears were large that caused everyone to make fun of him.

Match the causes on the left with the effects on the right. Place the correct letter on each line.

### Causes

### Effects

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ___ 1. The king's men were unfamiliar with the dungeon.                 | A. Soup was served for every lunch, dinner and banquet.           |
| ___ 2. The Princess Pea spotted him and called out the word "rat".      | B. Miggery Sow heard every single word Roscuro uttered.           |
| ___ 3. Roscuro wanted a better view of the banquet hall.                | C. The king outlawed soup, soup bowls and soup spoons.            |
| ___ 4. The queen loved soup.  | D. The king's men got lost in the mazes.                          |
| ___ 5. The queen died while eating soup.                                | E. Despereaux fell to the floor.                                  |
| ___ 6. Roscuro's voice was pitched perfectly to Mig's cauliflower ears. | F. He flung himself onto the chandelier and swung back and forth. |
| ___ 7. Mig loosened her grip.   | G. Roscuro fell into the queen's soup.                            |



### Create Your Own Cause and Effect Sentences

Write an original "cause-and-effect" sentence about something that happened in the story or about the way a character in the story felt.

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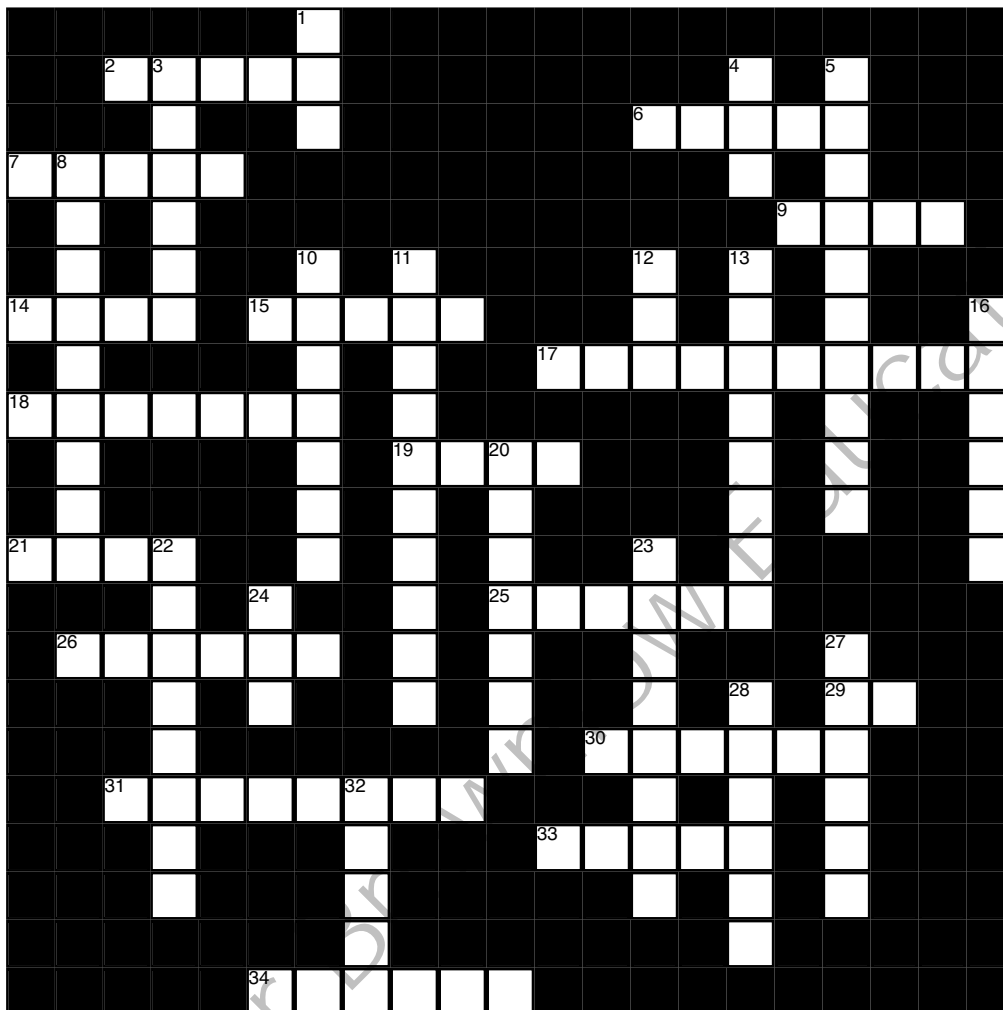
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# Crossword Puzzle

## *The Tale of Despereaux*

See how much you remember about *The Tale of Despereaux*. Have fun!



### ACROSS

2. What Mig called the man who bought her.
6. Roscuro used a royal soup spoon as this.
7. The French word for *farewell*.
9. She gave Despereaux some soup.
14. Author's first name.
15. Despereaux compared it to heaven and honey.
17. He told Roscuro to torture the prisoner.
18. Despereaux's family name.
19. Despereaux's were extremely large for a mouse.
21. The Queen's favourite meal.
25. These caused Mig's deafness.
26. What Gregory was.
29. Word often used in similes.
30. A mouse is one; so is a rat.
31. Used to describe 2 unlike things without *like* or *as*.
33. There was none in the dungeon.
34. Where this story is set.

### DOWN

1. Despereaux loved her.
3. Despereaux's sword.
4. Expression often used by Mig.
5. Despereaux's mother.
8. Author's last name.
10. Despereaux was sent there by Mouse Council.
11. Mig's full name.
12. Botticelli was one; so was Roscuro.
13. What 1 Down was.
16. Merlot's relation to Despereaux.
20. He planned to bring the princess to the dungeon.
22. Mig longed to be one.
23. He told the Mouse Council about his brother.
24. The colour of the prisoner's cloth.
27. The prisoner's relation to Mig.
28. Despereaux's father.
32. The threadmaster.