

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

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*for*

## Runt the Brave

by Daniel Schwabauer

Juvenile/YA Fiction - Fantasy  
Clear Water Press  
Hardcover 2004 / \$16.99  
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## ***About the Book***

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by Bob Spear

*Publisher and Chief Reviewer, Heartland Reviews*

“Who would have guessed that just behind a modern housing development lay a field and a forest which had become the setting for a genocidal war between field mice and an invading army of rats. JaRed, better known as “Runt” because of his diminutive size, is the first common mouse to discover the enemy rats’ advance scouts. His report of this discovery to the King’s Guards starts him on a journey that may land him on the King’s throne. That is, if his family doesn’t betray him first and something untoward happens to his new-found friend, the King’s son.

This is YA/Mid-grade fantasy at its absolute best! It not only earned five hearts, it scored an almost impossible 100% score using our demanding evaluation rubrics. The author has worked with troubled youth, and typical troubled personalities were scattered amongst the various characters. In places, the differences between good and evil were clearly defined. In others, we learn redemption and forgiveness are still possible-evil can become good and merely weak can become evil under the right conditions. Although not scored, the illustrations, the cover, and the interior design were absolutely top-notch-better than much which comes out of England and New York. This was an amazing read, richly deserving its five hearts.”

## ***About the Author***

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Daniel Schwabauer, M.A. is editor of Crosswind Comics, where he develops educational materials for youth-at-risk and prison inmates. His comic-book series *Amazing True Life Stories* has been read by hundreds of thousands in the U.S. and overseas.

His professional work includes articles, short stories, radio scripts, editorial columns, a three-act stage-play, and television scripting.

## ***Themes***

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Good vs. evil, right makes might, courage, finding one’s place in the world, self-sacrifice.

# Teaching Ideas

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## Pre-Reading Activities:

Discuss the overall theme of Good vs. Evil. Ask them to name some characteristics of each, and list them on a blackboard. Can Good and Evil ever be hard to recognize? Does evil sometimes pretend to be good, and vice versa? In what ways? Is it possible that people who do bad things think they're really doing good?

Discuss the concept of self-sacrifice. Why is it easy to admire someone who is willing to suffer for the good of someone else? Is it because we find this a difficult thing to do ourselves?

Discuss the idea of being talented. Are talents always easy to recognize? What talents do Americans tend to admire? Are there any talents that people don't admire, or perhaps even despise? Is it true that everyone has a talent of some kind?

Point out the glossary at the end of the book for when students have questions about characters and places.

Before reading the book, consider having students design and create a journal to record their artwork, writing assignments, and the answers to the discussion questions.

## Classroom Connections

### *Language Arts*

Discuss the difference between Fantasy and Science Fiction. What is the difference? What makes *Runt the Brave* a Fantasy? What elements of Fairy Tale and Myth are present? Can "animal fantasies" be considered a separate genre? What other books and movies fall into this same category?

Have your students write a story from the point of view of a rat in GoRec's army.

### *Social Studies*

The social structure of the mouse community is fairly complex, and built around a "city-state" model. Have students look up government systems in the middle ages and write a report based on their research.

The mice of Tira-Nor have oddly-spelled names that nevertheless follow a consistent pattern. Why did the author do this? Does it help advance the story? Does it make the world seem more alien or more familiar? What pattern is the author following? After students write out

their answers, direct them to the *Pronunciation Guide* and *Guide to Naming* at [www.RuntTheBrave.com](http://www.RuntTheBrave.com). How do their answers differ from those published by the author?

### ***Science***

Lack of water plays an important part in the book. Do real mice need much water? Where do they get their moisture?

Design a poster that shows a cut-away view of a real prairie dog village.

### ***Art***

Look at the chapter drawings in *Runt the Brave*. How many of the twelve pictures show characters in some kind of human clothing? How did the artist make the mouse characters more or less human in each picture?

Which characters are not depicted in the book? Have students pick a character from the book to depict in a pencil or ink drawing.

Observe the cover illustration. Discuss how Tonal Value and Color affect the mood or “feel” of artwork.

### ***Geography***

Ask students to draw a map of the tunnels of Tira-Nor as they imagine them from the book. Encourage them to include the separate sections of the city, the various gate-holes, and the escape tunnel. After their maps are complete, show them the author’s map on the website at [www.RuntTheBrave.com](http://www.RuntTheBrave.com).

### ***History***

In what ways does the underground city of Tira-Nor resemble a castle? How does its position underground affect the ways the mice go about defending it? Are there any similarities between the siege of Tira-Nor and the historic sieges of cities centuries ago?

Ask students to create a crest for King SoSheth or the rat, GoRec. This can be drawn on the front and back covers of their journal.

In chapter eight a battle is fought on the hill called “Round Top.” Have students look up the civil war battle of the same name.

### ***Mythology***

What creatures are involved in the fables the mice tell about their past? Why did the author choose real animals rather than fabulous ones for these stories? What purpose or purposes do the fables in *Runt the Brave* serve?

Have students write their own mouse fable for the mice of Tira-Nor. Encourage them to include themes of life and death as well as some moral lesson to be learned.

## Discussion Questions

# 1

### *Chapter One: The Coming of Rats*

#### For Younger Readers

1. What sort of creature is JaRed?
2. What is JaRed's unfortunate nickname?
3. What is JaRed doing when he discovers the two rats?
4. Where does JaRed hide?
5. What is the name of the underground mouse city?

#### For Older Readers

1. Who is the protagonist?
2. What is JaRed's biggest handicap? Does it help or hurt him in this chapter?
3. What is JaRed's unique talent?
4. Does Captain Blang seem friendly to JaRed? Why or why not?
5. Why did the author choose the Owl to be the "bearer of souls?"

#### Vocabulary

vigil, canopy, macabre, scavenge, thistle, predator, coax, dire, pungent, crevice, bulbous, perforated, myriad, inferior, phosphorescent, destiny, defy, treacherous, trivial, drought, practical

# 2

### *Chapter Two: The Calling of Runt*

#### For Younger Readers

1. What is HaRed's nickname? What does it mean?
2. TaMir is called a "Seer." What does a seer do?
3. In the story, how are seers usually marked?
4. Does JaRed want the future TaMir predicts?
5. What three words does Wroth use over and over?

#### For Older Readers

1. Why does HaRed resent his smaller brother?
2. What exactly does TaMir predict for JaRed's future?
3. Why doesn't JaRed like what TaMir says?
4. Why do the Sea Cave Mice treat Wroth kindly?
5. Why wouldn't they have understood the meaning of "doom?"

#### Vocabulary

apprentice, idiocy, militia, lumbered, pathetic, concoct, elect (n.), haunch, disjointed, usurp, immense, portend, desertion, jeer, fester

# 3

## *Chapter Three: Before the King*

### For Younger Readers

1. What is LaRish's normal rank in the kingsguard?
2. What is the King's name?
3. Does SoSeth seem like a good king? Why or why not?

### For Older Readers

1. Why is JaRed afraid of seeing the King?
2. Why does LaRish describe the king as "not one mouse, but two?"
3. TaMir advises against using the escape tunnel. Why?
4. What reason is given for Wroth's disappearance?
5. What is it about the king's attitude that bothers JaRed?

### Vocabulary

Vanquish, perimeter, lavish, antechamber, ominous, sarcasm, withering, scour, spasm, chirrup, gale, conviction, extravagant

# 4

## *Chapter Four: Black in the Tunnel*

### For Younger Readers

1. What sort of creature confronts JaRed in this chapter? What is its name?
2. Why doesn't JaRed like the Chamber of Wroth?
3. Is JaRed better off at the end of this chapter than he was at the beginning?

### For Older Readers

1. Why does the Owl in JaRed's dream become a snake? Does this symbolize anything?
2. In the dream, the snake calls the mice of Tira-Nor "your people." Why?
3. What purpose does the poem serve?
4. Are the new rats better off after their deal with Wroth?
5. Does JaRed learn anything important in this chapter?

### Vocabulary

Murky, vaporous, silhouette, spiral, labyrinth, malevolent, netherworld, trifle, diminutive, crave, frail, traitor, venomous, bluster

# 5

## *Chapter Five: Serpent Killer*

### For Younger Readers

1. Why is JaRed in trouble?
2. How is JaRed proved right?
3. Is SoSheth grateful? Why or why not?

For Older Readers

1. Why is King SoSheth so angry?
2. Is JaRed better off at the end of this chapter?
3. Where does HaRed go when he wants to think?
4. Is Wroth more of a threat when disembodied or less?
5. What would it mean for the Great Owl to arrive “early?”

Vocabulary

Rapsallion, dais, deplete, insolent, fraud, profound, eligible, alcove, muse (v.)

# 6

## *Chapter Six: In the House of Man*

For Younger Readers

1. Why does prince JoHanan make JaRed nervous at first?
2. Where are the rats hiding?
3. What does JaRed take from the house?
4. What does ElShua do to the Owl? Is this good or bad?

For Older Readers

1. Do LaRish, JoHanan and JaRed have anything in common?
2. LaRish sends JaRed on a mission? What is it?
3. What does GoRec do to Klogg? Is this reminiscent of an earlier part of the book? Even though Klogg was meant to JaRed earlier, do you feel sorry for him?
4. Why does JaRed pick up the nail?
5. What motivation does ElShua use to change the Owl?

Vocabulary

Gnarled, wit, prophecy, runnel, curfew, spangled, vindicate, grotesque, hunker, subdivision, navigate, burble, grisly, disorder, muffled, assail, shamble, cower, profuse, savage, enlist, wisp, misery

# 7

## *Chapter Seven: YuLooq*

For Younger Readers

1. Who is YuLooq?
2. What does JaRed see in his vision?

For Older Readers

1. Does YuLooq seem trustworthy? Why or why not?
2. What does JaRed see in his vision? Why did the author include it?
3. HaRed actually implicates two mice to YuLooq? Who are they?

Vocabulary

Taunt, wretched, cache, wary, billeted, intolerable, exhilarating, vulnerable, molten, intricate, submersion, vacant, epicenter, crescent, pelt (n.), gaunt, quota, foreboding, flotsam, opulence, prestige, vice, pompous, intrigue (n.)

# 8

## ***Chapter Eight: Round Top***

### For Younger Readers

1. Who sounds the alarm?
2. Why don't the rats cooperate more in battle?
3. Who comes back to help JaRed?
4. Where is LaRish at the end of the chapter?

### For Older Readers

1. Why are the mice outside the city?
2. What ancient mouse saying does LaRish follow?
3. Why does Captain Blang need volunteers. Who does he intend to rescue? Is this ironic?
4. Is it also ironic that JoHanan returns to help rescue JaRed? (What is irony?)
5. What do you expect LaRish to do?

### Vocabulary

Skirmish, unabashed, leverage, dispatch, quiver (v.), infectious, valiant, condescending, truce, horde, elation, fatigue

# 9

## ***Chapter Nine: LaRish***

### For Younger Readers

1. What does LaRish do?
2. What does HaRed tell the King?
3. What does JaRed do?

### For Older Readers

1. Why does LaRish challenge GoRec? Is there more than one reason?
2. Why don't the rats gang up on LaRish?
3. What is the last thing LaRish apparently does?
4. What does JaRed see when he is dragging LaRish's body?
5. Who is Tweener?

### Vocabulary

Haughty, adjacent, temperament, dissimilar, inimitable, arc, ferocious, empathy, asphyxiation, evacuate, congeal

# 10

## ***Chapter Ten: The Siege***

### For Younger Readers

1. What does HaRed hear?
2. How do the rats sneak into Tira-Nor?
3. What does JaRed volunteer to do?
4. What does HaRed's mother tell him to do?

#### For Older Readers

1. What is HaRed's response when he hears scratching?
2. We find out what SoSheth is really afraid of. What is it?
3. What terrible decision must HaRed make? Does his choice make him more or less admirable?
4. What does HaRed finally begin to understand in this chapter?
5. Why does the king give permission for JaRed to fight GoRec?

#### Vocabulary

Feint, smorgasbord, parley, hostile, fortified, cozy, sphere, disgorge, spite, waver, impending, expendable, preliminary, dismay, demeanor, fruition, connotations, gouge, dissipate, invader, intervene, opportune, imperceptible, distinct, retainer, cocksure, marvel, glisten

# 11

## *Chapter Eleven: GoRec*

#### For Younger Readers

1. What does JaRed want to do?
2. Why doesn't he do it?
3. How does GoRec die?
4. Why do the other rats run away?

#### For Older Readers

1. What choice is JaRed faced with, and how does TaMir help him?
2. According to TaMir, what is it that "gives life color?"
3. What is it that finally changes HaRed's attitude towards his brother?
4. The fight with GoRec takes on a larger meaning for JaRed. What else is at stake besides his own fate and that of Tira-Nor?
5. Is it too late for GoRec to change?

#### Vocabulary

Convulsing, suffocate, deficiency, swollen, emphasis, utterly, torrent, erupt, escort, derision, graceful, talon, course (v.), sneer, tactics, pummel, irresistible, core, veil, pendulum, guillotine, pike, absorb, assault, vengeance, bulk, preposterous, aura, mystique, fiend, converge, engrossed, menacing, roil, churn (v.)

# 12

## *Chapter Twelve: Horrid*

#### For Younger Readers

1. Who stays away from the party?
2. What does TaMir see? Which mouse is it?
3. What does HaRed ask JaRed to do?
4. Does JaRed do it?

#### For Older Readers

1. Who is the mouse in TaMir's vision? How can we know?
2. Why would the vision comfort the mice?
3. The author tells us that, "the how of JaRed becoming

king of Tira-Nor is not to be found in this book (although, if you know where to look, it may be found in another).” What does this mean?

Can it mean more than one thing?

4. How has HaRed changed since the second chapter?

5. What does JaRed realize at the very end?

Vocabulary

Sulk, celebrate, fiction, gaudy, quicksilver, foretaste