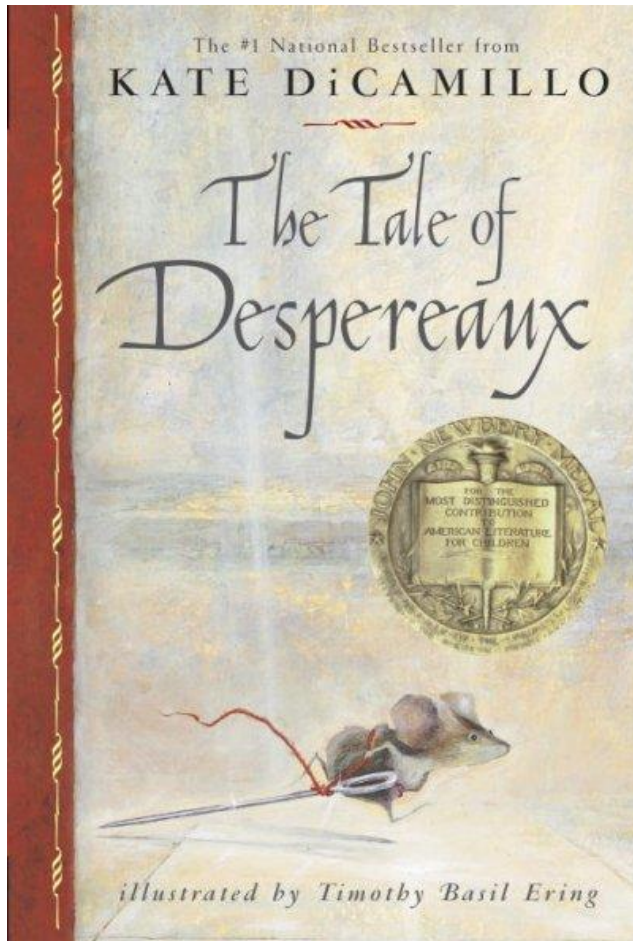


About the book...



Despereaux Tilling is a young mouse whose personal oddities put him at odds with his own world, even with his own family. He is banished to a dark dungeon, where he meets Chiaroscuro, a rat, who is obsessed with finding his way to the light. Despereaux falls in love with Princess Pea, a human, who appreciates his unique qualities, but whose father is quite opposed to the match, of course. The paths of these three unlikely characters intersect with that of Miggery Sow, a slow-witted servant girl who dreams of being a real princess, and their stories conclude in traditional fairy-tale fashion.

-Books & Authors

About the Author...



When she was five, Kate DiCamillo moved with her family from Philadelphia to a small town in Florida. She grew up with one brother and a black standard poodle named Nanette, whom she enjoyed dressing up in a green ballet tutu and later as a disco dancer.

DiCamillo is "short and loud," as she admits on her website. Though she trained to become an author, prior to 2000 DiCamillo had only published a few adult short stories in magazines. She worked in Minneapolis for the Bookman, a book distributor, in the children's department where she was surrounded all day, every day by books for children and soon fell in love with them.

It was during this time in Minneapolis, while she was missing the warm weather of Florida and wanting a dog but unable to have one in her apartment building, that DiCamillo began her first novel. Jennifer M. Brown, who interviewed the author for *Publishers Weekly*, reported: "This is what happened: she was just about to go to sleep when the book's narrator, India Opal Buloni, spoke to her, saying, 'I have a dog named Winn-Dixie.' DiCamillo says that after hearing that voice, 'the story told itself.'" From that moment, DiCamillo never stopped listening, and from India Opal Buloni in *Because of Winn-Dixie* to the mouse Despereaux in [*The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread*](#), each of her narrators has given voice to a new story, different from the last.

DiCamillo currently lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota with her dog, Henry.

For more information visit the author's website at <http://www.katedicamillo.com/>

Selected Writings

- [*Because of Winn Dixie*](#), Candlewick Press (Boston, MA), 2000.
- [*The Magician's Elephant*](#), Candlewick Press (Somerville, MA), 2009.
- [*The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*](#), Candlewick Press (Cambridge, MA), 2006.
- [*The Tiger Rising*](#), Candlewick Press (Cambridge, MA), 2001.
- [*Bink & Gollie*](#) series
- [*Mercy Watson*](#) series

Awards

Newbery Medal: *The Tale of Despereaux* (2004); Newbery Honor: *Because of Winn Dixie* (2001)

Reviews

School Library Journal

A charming story of unlikely heroes whose destinies entwine to bring about a joyful resolution. Foremost is Despereaux, a diminutive mouse who, as depicted in Ering's pencil drawings, is one of the most endearing of his ilk ever to appear in children's books. His mother, who is French, declares him to be "such the disappointment" at his birth and the rest of his family seems to agree that he is very odd: his ears are too big and his eyes open far too soon and they all expect him to die quickly. Of course, he doesn't. Then there is the human Princess Pea, with whom Despereaux falls deeply (one might say desperately) in love. She appreciates him despite her father's prejudice against rodents. Next is Roscuro, a rat with an uncharacteristic love of light and soup. Both these predilections get him into trouble. And finally, there is Miggery Sow, a peasant girl so dim that she believes she can become a princess. With a masterful hand, DiCamillo weaves four story lines together in a witty, suspenseful narrative that begs to be read aloud. In her authorial asides, she hearkens back to literary traditions as old as those used by Henry Fielding. In her observations of the political machinations

and follies of rodent and human societies, she reminds adult readers of George Orwell. But the unpredictable twists of plot, the fanciful characterizations, and the sweetness of tone are DiCamillo's own. This expanded fairy tale is entertaining, heartening, and, above all, great fun. Grade 3 Up

Booklist

Starred Review Forgiveness, light, love, and soup. These essential ingredients combine into a tale that is as soul stirring as it is delicious. Despereaux, a tiny mouse with huge ears, is the bane of his family's existence. He has fallen in love with the young princess who lives in the castle where he resides and, having read of knights and their ladies, vows to "honor her." But his unmouselike behavior gets him banished to the dungeon, where a swarm of rats kill whoever falls into their clutches. Another story strand revolves around Miggery, traded into service by her father, who got a tablecloth in return. Mig's desire to be a princess, a rat's yen for soup (a food banished from the kingdom after a rat fell in a bowl and killed the queen), and Despereaux's quest to save his princess after she is kidnapped climax in a classic fairy tale, rich and satisfying. Part of the charm comes from DiCamillo's deceptively simple style and short chapters in which the author addresses the reader: "Do you think rats do not have hearts? Wrong. All living things have a heart." And as with the best stories, there are important messages tucked in here and there, so subtly that children who are carried away by the words won't realize they have been uplifted until much later. Ering's soft pencil illustrations reflect the story's charm. Gr. 3-6.

Kirkus Reviews

Dear reader, light your lamp and listen to the tale of Despereaux, the last mouse born of Antoinette. Born with his eyes open and ears much too large, Despereaux seems destined for early death. A true Renaissance mouse, he can hear honey, read words, and appreciate fine music. But he cannot conform to the strictures of the mouse world. Rodents and humans don't mix, yet he falls in love with the Princess Pea, earning the wrath of all the mice in the castle. The melodramatic voice of the narrator glides through DiCamillo's entirely pleasing tale, at times addressing the reader directly, at others, moving the reader back and forward in time. Never does she abandon the reader in the dungeon with Despereaux, the dark-hearted rats, or the guard and fellow inmate, Gregory. And so unwinds a tale with twists and turns, full of forbidden soup and ladles, rats lusting for mouse blood, a servant who wishes to be a princess, a knight in shining—or, at least, furry—armor, and all the ingredients of an old-fashioned drama. (*Fiction. 7-12*)

Discussion Questions (<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/tale-despereaux-discussion-guide>)

1. List three mice rules that Despereaux breaks in the beginning of the story. What punishment does he receive from the Mouse Council?
2. Why isn't Miggery Sow afraid as she stands in the dungeon with Gregory's meal?
3. What does Botticelli tell Roscuro will happen if he goes up into the light? Was his prediction accurate? Explain your answer.
4. Describe Despereaux's dream about the Knight. How does the dream help Despereaux on his quest?
5. Despereaux encounters the Cook on two occasions. How is the cook's attitude toward Despereaux different during their second meeting? What do you think is the reason for the change in her attitude?
6. Describe the relationship between Miggery Sow and the Princess Pea. What do they have in common? What are their differences?
7. Which characters help Despereaux overcome the challenges he faces on his quest to save the Princess Pea? How does each character help him? Imagine Despereaux meets you on his way to the dungeon. Using your knowledge of the dungeon, what advice would you give Despereaux to help him succeed?
8. Imagine you have broken a rule and have been banished from your community. What would you miss most? If it meant you could return to the community, would you say you were sorry, even if you felt you had done nothing wrong?
9. Miggery Sow tells several characters that she is going to be a princess. Which characters does she say this to? Compare and contrast their reactions to Miggery's statement. What does each character's reaction tell us about him or her?
10. In the beginning of the story, Despereaux reads a fairy tale to himself in the library. In what ways is the book you just read like a fairy tale? In what ways is it like real life?
11. Imagine you are Lester at the moment the Mouse Council votes to banish Despereaux to the dungeon. What, if anything, would you say to convince the council not to send Despereaux away? Why do you think Lester remained silent?

12. Roscuro tells Miggery Sow that aspirations are "those things that make a serving girl want to be a princess." Choose three characters from the story and describe their aspirations. Which character's aspirations do you admire most? Least?

14. Now that you know more about Despereaux, think back to the moment of his birth when his parents and siblings first laid eyes on him. What was unusual about him? Do you think the author gave Despereaux these unusual traits for a reason? What might these features symbolize about Despereaux's character?

Activities

Watch the film [The Tale of Despereaux](#).

Try making soup. Check out some cookbooks or find recipes online at: <http://allrecipes.com/recipes/soups-stews-and-chili/soup/main.aspx>

Read-Alikes

E. B. White, [Stuart Little](#) (1945)

This classic of children's literature details the adventures of Stuart Little, a young mouse born into a human family. This fact doesn't seem to faze any of the other Littles, and young Stuart is accepted as if he is human. The only family member irked by his existence is Snowbell, the family cat. Along the way Stuart goes on some amazing adventures and forms a friendship with a bird named Margalo.

Alan Armstrong, [Whittington](#) (2005)

Whittington is a retelling of the English folktale about Dick Whittington, a famous English adventurer, and his cat. Whittington is a weary, homeless tomcat that wanders into a barn in New England. The other animals in the barn were once in his shoes, until they were adopted by the owner of the barn, a compassionate man named Bernie. Whittington makes friends with the barn animals and begins regaling them with tales of his ancestor, a cat that belonged to Dick Whittington. Alan Armstrong's book brings to life both the medieval world of Dick Whittington's cat and the current barnyard shenanigans of the modern-day Whittington. Children will be charmed by the bantering among the barn animals.

Robert C. O'Brien, [Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH](#) (1971)

Mrs. Frisby, a widowed mouse with four small children, is faced with a terrible problem. She must move her family to their summer quarters immediately, or face almost certain death. But her youngest son, Timothy, lies ill with pneumonia and must not be moved. Fortunately, she encounters the rats of NIMH, an extraordinary breed of highly

intelligent creatures, who come up with a brilliant solution to her dilemma. And Mrs. Frisby in turn renders them a great service.

Terry Pratchett, [*The Amazing Maurice and His Educated Rodents*](#) (2001)

The Amazing Maurice runs the perfect Pied Piper scam. This streetwise alley cat knows the value of cold, hard cash and can talk his way into and out of anything. But when Maurice and his cohorts decide to con the town of Bad Blinitz, it will take more than fast talking to survive the danger that awaits. For this is a town where food is scarce and rats are hated, where cellars are lined with deadly traps, and where a terrifying evil lurks beneath the hunger-stricken streets....

Kathi Appelt, [*The Underneath*](#) (2008)

In a swampy east Texas forest, where trees have thousand-year memories, an abandoned cat and her kittens, Puck and Sabine, befriend a chained-up hound and move underneath his porch. Ranger's abusive owner spends his nights searching the swamps for Alligator King, who awaits the return of his friend, Grandmother Moccasin, a half-human, half-serpent imprisoned in a jar for 1,000 years. Grandmother, stewing in bitterness because her daughter took human form to marry Hawk Man, waits patiently to be reunited with her daughter. When Puck ventures out from underneath Ranger's porch, he sets in motion a series of events that binds all these characters together.



Ann Arbor District Library