



BOOK STATS

Grade Level Equivalent: 5–8

Ages: 10+

Lexile Measure®: 630L

Pages: 24

Genre: Fantasy, Adventure

Subject/Theme: Courage, Quest, Good and Evil

Common Core State Standards	Reading	Writing	Listening & Speaking	Language
Grade 5	RL.5.1, RL.5.3, RL.5.4, RL.5.9	W.5.1, W.5.3	SL.5.1, SL.5.4	L.5.4, L.5.5
Grade 6	RL.6.1, RL.6.4, RL.6.7, RL.6.10	W.6.1, W.6.3	SL.6.1, SL.6.4	L.6.4, L.6.5
Grade 7	RL.7.1, RL.7.3, RL.7.4, RL.7.10	W.7.1, W.7.3	SL.7.1, SL.7.4	L.7.4, L.7.5
Grade 8	RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.4, RL.8.10	W.8.1, W.8.3	SL.8.1, SL.8.4	L.8.4, L.8.5

Teaching the Book

Gregor the Overlander begins the saga of eleven-year-old Gregor's quest to save the creatures of the Underland and to fulfill the prophecy of becoming the brave warrior leader. This compelling and adventure-filled story, written by Suzanne Collins, provides the opportunity to teach the fantasy genre, the skill of analyzing setting, and the use of connotative language. Activities will engage students in mapping the Underland, researching underground animals, and creating their own imaginative world.

Theme Focus: Fantasy

Comprehension Focus: Analyze Setting

Language Focus: Words With Dark Connotations

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzanne Collins was inspired to write her first novel while thinking one day about *Alice in Wonderland*. What would happen if a modern, urban child fell down a mysterious hole? Where would he or she end up? That was the genesis of *Gregor the Overlander*, the first book in her best-selling, five-part fantasy series for middle-grade readers: The Underland Chronicles.

Next, Collins set her prolific imagination to work on a fantasy series for readers 12 and up. When the first book of the Hunger Games Trilogy appeared in 2008, it immediately became a critically acclaimed, award-winning sensation. In 2012, the movie version of *The Hunger Games* introduced an even wider audience to the powerful dystopian fantasy story.

Suzanne Collins lives with her family in Connecticut. For more information about the author, please visit:

www.suzannecollinsbooks.com.

OVERVIEW

Book Summary

When Gregor tries to rescue his little sister, Boots, after she falls through a grate in their apartment building, he finds himself hurtling through a darkness that never seems to end—until he lands with a thump in a bizarre land full of giant cockroaches. While Boots seems to delight in this new world, Gregor has only one desire—to escape the Underland and return home. However, Gregor's adventure has only just begun. He soon meets the people of the Underland, as well as, their enemies—huge, bloodthirsty rats who are waging a war against the Underlanders and their city, Regalia.

The Underlanders reveal to Gregor two shocking pieces of information. His father, who had disappeared over two years ago, is a prisoner of the rats in the Underland. And they believe Gregor to be the great warrior described by the Underlanders' ancient leader in a strange prophecy. Is it really Gregor's fate to save the future of the subterranean world? Reluctantly, Gregor accepts the quest to defeat the enemy rats in their war against the Underlanders in hopes that he can also rescue his missing father.

The author creates a fantastical world of bizarre creatures, dream-like settings, and pale-eyed humans with amazing skills. Yet this strange world becomes real for young readers as they follow Gregor on his quest to battle the forces of evil and discover his own powers for good.

Get Ready to Read

Pre-Reading Activities

Concept Map Engage students' interest by creating a concept map for the genre of fantasy. Remind them that a fantasy is set in a place that does not really exist and is about strange people, creatures, and events that are imagined by the author. These make-believe worlds become real to us through the author's descriptions of places and characters. Ask students to name their favorite fantasy books and movies and add them to the concept map.



Discuss the settings and characters in the fantasies that students list and ask them to explain which are their favorites and why.

Preview and Predict Tell students that author Suzanne Collins wrote *Gregor the Overlander* when she thought about what would happen if an urban child fell down a manhole into an underground world. Ask students to predict what kind of world might exist in the “Underland.”



BIG QUESTION

Critical Thinking Ask students to think about this question as they read and be ready to answer it when they have finished the book. Write the question on chart paper or have students record it in their reading journals.

Does Gregor have what it takes to be a true warrior?

STORIA ENRICHMENTS

This Storia e-book has the following enrichments to enhance students' comprehension of the book.

- Word Twister (3)
- Do You Know?
- Word Scramble (2)
- About You
- Who Said It?

Vocabulary

Words With Dark Connotations Explain to students that words have two different kinds of meanings. *Denotation* is the dictionary definition of a word. *Connotation* is the emotional or imaginative meaning associated with a word.

The author uses many words with dark or negative connotations to describe the Underland and its inhabitants. Remind students to look for clues in the text for the word meanings and then write the definitions on the vocabulary cards.

Distribute copies of **Resource #1: Vocabulary Cards** on page 7 to students.

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| monstrous (p. 25) | queasy (p. 38) |
| staggered (p. 81) | viciously (p. 86) |
| annihilation (p. 121) | eerie (p. 178) |
| writhing (p. 190) | cannibalism (p. 228) |

As You Read

Reading the Book

Modeled Reading Give students a taste of the compelling adventure and model fluency by reading aloud an excerpt from Chapter 9 on pages 91 and 92. Discuss with students what they have learned so far about the fantasy world of *Gregor the Overlander*.

Independent Reading Have students read the book independently. Encourage them to partner with another student to share questions and reactions to the book.

Comprehension Focus

Analyze Setting Setting is an important literary element in the fantasy genre. The imaginative world that an author creates sets the stage for the protagonist's quest and for the battle of good and evil. Whereas setting in a realistic novel encompasses time and place, in a fantasy novel setting also includes the strange creatures and magical powers that are part of the fantasy world of the author.

Use the graphic organizer on **Resource #2: Analyze Setting** to model for students how to find text evidence for the various elements of setting in *Gregor the Overlander*. Project the page on a whiteboard or pass out copies to students.

Model: First, I'm going to look for a description of a place that helps create the author's fantasy world. On page 45, Gregor gets his first glimpse of Regalia. "The buildings here were all a lovely misty gray which gave them a dreamlike quality. . . . Thousands of torches were placed strategically so that a soft, dusky light illuminated the entire city." I'll write the page number and the words into the organizer.

Guide students to fill in the rest of the organizer using examples from the text of descriptions of the creatures, humans, and strange events in the Underland. Ask how these descriptions help create the fantasy world for readers.

After You Read

Questions to Discuss

Lead students in a discussion of these focus story elements.

1. The Fantasy Genre The Underland is a fantasy world, but parts of it are based on creatures and settings that are familiar. What are these familiar

things? Do they make the Underland seem real? (*Sample answer: Rats, cockroaches, and bats all live in dark places in the real world. It makes sense that they might be giants in the Underland.*)

2. Analyze Setting How do humans travel between the Overland and Underland? (*Sample answer: There are five portals between the two worlds.*) How does Gregor and Boots fall into the Underland? How do they get back to New York City? (*Sample answers: They fall through a grate in the laundry room of their apartment building. They come back out through a staircase leading to a stone door that brings them to Central Park.*)

3. Words With Dark Connotations Find a scene in the book that you would describe as eerie. (*Sample answer: When the cockroaches dance around Boots as though she is a queen.*)

Questions to Share

Encourage students to share their responses with a partner or small group.

1. Text-to-Self How would you react to falling into the Underland? Would you try to escape?

WORDS TO KNOW

Words With Dark Connotations

Ask students to refer to the definitions they wrote on their vocabulary cards to answer each question below.

1. What did you think was the most **monstrous** creature in the Underland?
2. What event made you feel **queasy** when you read about it?
3. What creature attacks most **viciously**?
4. When did you think that Gregor faced **annihilation**?
5. Describe how a creature would look if it were **writhing**.
6. What is an example of **cannibalism** in the book?

2. Text-to-World What other places can you imagine might be portals to the Underland? Are there possible underground passages and entrances in the place where you live?

3. Text-to-Text Compare Gregor's adventures with the adventures of another young character in a fantasy novel. Which character do you think is most believable and why?

Extension Activities

Reading/Writing Connection

Book Review & Rating Fantasy is a genre that sparks strong opinions from students. Challenge students to write a review of *Gregor the Overlander*, giving it a rating of one to four stars. First, have them each create a star rating system, deciding what—for them—makes a four-star book as opposed to a one-star book. Then ask students to rate the book according to their own criteria and write

an opinion essay that explains their rating. Emphasize that every opinion is legitimate as long as it is supported by reasoning and evidence.

Don't forget the



BIG QUESTION

Critical Thinking Give each student an opportunity to answer the big question. Encourage students to support their answers with details and evidence from the text. Remind them that there is no one right answer.

Does Gregor have what it takes to be a true warrior?

Content Area Connections

Geography **Map the Underland** Challenge students to map the fantasy world of the Underland, starting with Gregor's fall through the grate and ending with his return to New York City. They should include the major parts of the Underland including Regalia, the lands of the crawlers, spinner, and gnawers; and the portals between the Underland and the Overland.

Art **Underground Animals** Assign students to find photographs of animals that live underground or in dark places—like the creatures in the Underland. Encourage them to find pictures of moles, earthworms, woodchucks, ants, and bats. Then have them make a slideshow of these animals. To add drama, ask them to write original descriptions of Gregor encountering gigantic versions of these strange creatures in the Underland.

Language Arts **Quests** A quest undertaken by a young protagonist is a common theme in adventure fantasy stories. Ask partners to make a list of fantasy books and movies that involve a quest. Have them list the titles and the main char-

acter and his or her quest. Prompt them by suggesting they begin with *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings*.

Science **Adaptation** The Underlanders are humans who left the Overland centuries ago and retreated underground. Ask students to find descriptions in the book of how they have adapted to their new environment. How do the adaptations help them survive? What would happen to them if they came back to the Overland?

BIG ACTIVITY

A Strange Fantasy World Ask students to apply what they learned about the elements of a fantasy world from reading *Gregor the Overlander* by creating their own fantasy setting. Ask students to complete the **Big Activity: A Strange Fantasy World**. After they answer the question prompts, encourage them to write a scene that takes place in their world that features a young hero on a quest.

Name: _____ Date: _____

BIG ACTIVITY: A Strange Fantasy World

Create your own fantasy world and give it a name. Describe what the fantasy world looks like and who lives there.

What is the name of your fantasy world? _____

How is it reached? _____

What does it look like? _____

Who are the people who live there? _____

What are their special powers? _____

What other creatures live in the world? _____

What is the battle between good and evil in the world? _____

Write a short scene that takes place in your fantasy world. _____

READ MORE AND LEARN MORE

Use these books and other resources to expand your students' study of the book or theme.

Author/Series Connections



Gregor and the Marks of Secret

Suzanne Collins

Ages: 10–14

Grades: 5–8

Lexile Measure®: 730L

Pages: 352

Guided Reading Level: V

Gregor is no stranger to the Underland, having been there before to rescue members of his family. Now, the Underlanders and gentle Nibbler mice are under threat from the evil rat army. With the help of Princess Luxa and a rat named Ripred, Gregor must prepare to be the warrior promised in a prophecy. Fantasy fans will easily lose themselves in this pulse-pounding adventure. **Available as a Storia e-book**



Gregor and the Code of Claw

Suzanne Collins

Ages: 10–14

Grades: 5–8

Lexile Measure®: 730L

Pages: 416

Gregor is the centerpiece of the Underland's

Prophecy of Time, and now realizes the tragedy of his fate. Gregor must fight the ultimate battle as an army of rats makes their way to Regalia. Gregor struggles with his own dark side, his feelings for Princess Luxa, and the Code of Claw in the climactic finale to this jaw-dropping adventure series. **Available as a Storia e-book**

Theme Connections



Across the Great Barrier

Patricia C. Wrede

Ages: 10–14

Grades: 5–8

Lexile Measure®: 1020L

Pages: 352

Eighteen-year-old Eff isn't sure she wants the burden of being a skilled magician. She just wants to explore the world beyond the Great Barrier Spell, which protects people against the dangerous creatures of the Far West. But when her father's colleague, Professor Torgeson, hires her as an assistant on his expedition, she discovers a mysterious power that is turning living beings into stone. Can Eff figure what is behind this deadly magic before it's too late?

Available as a Storia e-book



Troubletwisters: Book 1

Garth Nix and Sean Williams

Ages: 10–14

Grades: 5–8

Pages: 304

After Jaide and Jack Shield's house is mysteriously destroyed, they are taken in by Grandma X. Soon, Jaide and Jack learn that they are apprentice magicians, and it's Grandma X's job to teach them how to harness their powers so that they can take on a dangerous force. Can the two young magicians find a way to defeat this force, or will their apprenticeship be over before it's started? **Available as a Storia e-book**



The Crowfield Case

Pat Walsh

Ages: 11–14

Grades: 5–7

Lexile Measure®: 840L

Pages: 352

It's 1347, and Will, an orphan boy, lives and works as an apprentice of the Crowfield monks. Sent into the forest to gather firewood, Will stumbles across a wounded hobgoblin. The hobgoblin confesses a horrible secret: buried deep in the snow behind the abbey is an angel. What does this angel have to do with the history of Crowfield? To find the answer, Will finds himself drawn into a dangerous, medieval world of Old Magic. **Available as a Storia e-book**



Moon & Sun, Book 1: The Ruby Key

Holly Lisle

Ages: 10–14

Grades: 5–8

Lexile Measure®: 860L

Pages: 384

Humans rule the day, and creatures called

Nightlings rule the night—and the two are never supposed to meet. But when Genna and her brother, Dan, venture into the old forest at night, they encounter a Nightling slave who reveals a terrifying secret: Genna and Dan's village chieftain has made a deal with Letrin, ruler of the Nightlings, and has offered his people's lives in exchange for becoming immortal. Now the siblings must embark upon a journey and bring back the key to Letrin's downfall. **Available as a Storia e-book**



The False Prince

Jennifer A. Nielson

Ages: 10–14

Grades: 5–8

Lexile Measure®: 710L

Pages: 352

Guided Reading Level: Z

The royal family has been murdered, the country of Carthya is on the brink of civil war, and a scheming nobleman plans to replace the kingdom's long-lost prince with an imposter. Sage is a rebellious orphan who is forced to compete to be chosen as the false prince. Secrets are revealed, alliances forged, backs stabbed, and kingdoms overthrown in this exciting royal charade. **Available as a Storia e-book**

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<http://teacher.scholastic.com/ereading-resources/>

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Name: _____ Date: _____

RESOURCE #2: Analyze Setting

Record details of each element of the fantasy setting in *Gregor the Overlander*.

Details of Fantasy Setting

PLACES	
HUMANS	
CREATURES	
STRANGE EVENTS	