

Fantasy Book Clubs: The Magic of Themes and Symbols
Grade 5: Fiction, Unit 4

Readers, today you will read a story called “Three’s a Crowd” by Kimbra Gish. Then you will watch a video called “Runaway.” After you read the story and watch the video, you will be asked to stop and answer a few questions. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

<p>1. The author starts the story with these sentences: <i>Surely, I thought, stretching upon my cushion, my life is perfect.</i> I loved to lie purring in Queen Arabella’s arms as she plotted evil enchantments against the prince in the next realm. Someday, we would destroy him. Being the right-hand cat of an evil queen had been my dream since I was a kitten. I’d been with Queen Arabella for nearly six years, and I intended to spend the rest of my life helping her plot. How is this part of the story important to the whole?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Analyzing Parts of a Story in Relation to the Whole</i></p>	<p>2. The author uses some of the techniques of fantasy writers in this story. Discuss what you notice about the author’s craft techniques.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Analyzing Author’s Craft</i></p>
<p>3. What themes are especially important in this story? Provide evidence to support your ideas.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Determining Themes/Cohesion</i></p>	<p>4. “Three’s a Crowd” and “Runaway” explore some similar theme/life lessons. Compare and contrast a theme or lesson that is developed in both stories.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Comparing and Contrasting Story Elements and Themes</i></p>

“Three’s a Crowd”

by Kimbra Gish

Surely, I thought, stretching upon my cushion, *my life is perfect*. I loved to lie purring in Queen Arabella’s arms as she plotted evil enchantments against the prince in the next realm. Someday, we would destroy him. Being the right-hand cat of an evil queen had been my dream since I was a kitten. I’d been with Queen Arabella for nearly six years, and I intended to spend the rest of my life helping her plot.

“Mittens! Surprise!”

I jumped down. What could it be? A platter of the prince’s liver, fried with sweet onions? But in the antechamber, I found myself facing a *dog* so tiny it could fit in the Queen’s hand, with fur like gold.

“Mittens,” Queen Arabella cooed, oblivious to my distress, “this is Destroyer. He is going to be part of our family.”

“We don’t *need* anyone else in this family!” I replied, swishing my tail irritably.

Destroyer grinned. “I suppose you think you’re in charge of the world?”

“I’m in charge of the palace!” I retorted. But I was *worried*. Didn’t Queen Arabella love me anymore? Did she want to get *rid* of me?

“Don’t be ridiculous, Mittens!” Queen Arabella sniffed. “Go think of a better way to welcome our new family member.” She scooped up the horrid ball of fur and entered the throne room.

What was I going to do? Queen Arabella didn’t WANT me anymore.

Just then, Destroyer ran out from the throne room, smiling. “Mittens, I’m afraid I haven’t been very friendly,” he said. “Let’s go out and do something together.”

Maybe if I could pretend to get along with Destroyer, the Queen would love me again. “Lead on!” I said.

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We raced out the gate, around the block, and then down a long street. I huffed. I puffed. I wasn’t used to running and had gotten rather fat. Usually, I rode in Queen Arabella’s carriage. The sound of Destroyer laughing jerked me back to reality. “I’ve brought the perfect playfellow for you,” he called. “Toodles!” Then he darted around a corner and was gone.

Suddenly, I saw behind me a Bumblesnook—a fearsome, magical creature! Queen Arabella had captured one, but I’d never seen one up close. It was horrible, as tall as a three-story building, snarling through rows of knife-sharp teeth. As I huffed and puffed away from the growling Bumblesnook, a thought occurred to me. Wasn’t *I* the evil cat of an evil queen? Could *I* perhaps rule a Bumblesnook, as she did? 35

I stopped and turned. The Bumblesnook skidded to a stop, growling. I hissed, unsheathing my claws and arching my back. The Bumblesnook looked startled. “Since you are brave enough to challenge me,” it said, “I grant you three questions.” 40

I knew I must ask wisely and well. “How do I get back home?” I asked.

The Bumblesnook shook its head. “I am bound not to tell you. A tiny, golden, wicked creature set an enchantment on me never to reveal that to you. He set me free today to devour you, and is plotting to take your beloved Queen’s throne.” 45

I thought: Tiny, golden, wicked? It must be *Destroyer* who had done this. *Destroyer* who was now planning evil deeds against the Queen. “How can I win back the Queen’s heart and show her the truth about *Destroyer*?” I asked. 50

“That is two questions in one!” snorted the Bumblesnook. “The answer is the same for both.” It poked a claw toward my chest, where my heart was. “The answer lies in there.”

“What do you mean, the answer lies in there?” I demanded.

The Bumblesnook walked away. “Search yourself, Mittens,” it called back. “You have the answer. If you wish to know more, look for the old fence, which hides the home of forgotten cats. Just follow your nose, down that street,” he said, pointing vaguely. 55

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Sniffing around, I picked up a strange scent and followed it. The awful smell grew stronger and stronger until I stood before a broken fence. I poked my head through a fence-hole but couldn’t focus on what lay beyond, for the rest of my body was stuck! Clearly I had indulged in too much cream. I had to get through! So I sucked in my middle and PUSHED! And at last I popped through, falling head over paws. 60

Garbage was everywhere! I nearly gagged from the stench of rotting tuna and cabbage. But if there was someone here to help me learn how to win back Queen Arabella’s love and save her from *Destroyer*’s evil plans, I *had* 65

to stay. Looking around, I saw hundreds of cats. Suddenly, a pair of Siamese cats circled me with a menacing air. “What do you seek?” they demanded.

My stomach lurched. “I seek answers,” I said. 70

“If it is answers you seek,” hissed one, “ask the Old One, Ancient Among the Forgotten.”

The Siamese cats led me to the back of the lot, where an enormous Himalayan cat held court upon a dung-heap, surrounded by watchful, scraggly cats. 75

“Tell me, Mittens,” said the Old One, “what does your heart most desire?”

“I want my family back,” I said. “I want Queen Arabella to love me as she did.”

The Old One answered, “To learn the answer, you must solve a riddle: what is the best thing in the world you could wish for?” 80

I looked around at all the sad, neglected felines. What could be the best thing in the world to wish for, if I could not have Queen Arabella’s love back? Memories flooded my heart. I remembered how she lifted me into her lap each morning, stroking my fur. Or the night she called in the royal veterinarian, when my belly ached from too many cream puffs. 85

Glancing down, I saw a battered toy mouse. She had given me a similar toy for my last birthday. I batted at the one before me now, and it gave a feeble squeak. And suddenly I knew my heart’s desire. “I wish for Queen Arabella’s happiness and safety,” I said firmly. 90

The Old One smiled. “You are wise,” he said, then added, “Rumor has it the Queen is miserable. Her beloved pet is missing.”

What could the sage mean? Perhaps Destroyer had never made it back to the palace after leading me astray. *Good!* whispered a small part of me. *Serves her right!* 95

NO, insisted my heart. She does not deserve my bitterness. I must find Destroyer, and reveal his evil intentions against the Queen. I must make sure she is happy and safe.

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I raced out of the lot and in the direction of the palace, hoping it wasn’t too late. I had to get Destroyer to tell me the truth, but how? Then my mind began to turn, and I came up with a plan. 100

At last I slipped back into the royal gardens, hoping he had returned. What I discovered was the sound of weeping. And it sounded like Queen Arabella.

As I approached, I saw Destroyer in her lap! 105

When he saw me, Destroyer leapt to my side. "I thought you were gone," he whispered. "Don't you know when you're not wanted? Why didn't the Bumblesnook eat you?"

Just then, Queen Arabella swept me up in her arms. "Oh, my precious Mittens!" she cried. "I thought you were lost forever!" She had been weeping for *me*! 110

"You don't want to replace me?" I asked, trembling with joy. What could it matter what Destroyer thought, if Queen Arabella loved me?

"Never!" cried Queen Arabella. "I thought a companion might bring you joy." She stroked my fur till I could not stop purring. "What I can't imagine," she continued, "is how in the world you got out. And I am told my Bumblesnook is missing! Do you know anything about that, Mittens?" 115

I smiled my most winning smile. "I met your Bumblesnook on the way back, my queen, and what a delight he was."

Destroyer's mouth fell open. "That's impossible!" he cried. "The Bumblesnook is a vicious beast!" 120

"Really?" I asked. "I found him charming. You must have met a different one, or you would agree."

Destroyer glared. "I'm POSITIVE we met the same one!" he protested. "It was beneath the palace, and it was vicious! Why, I had to put a powerful enchantment on it to keep it from having me for lunch!" Then he clapped a paw over his mouth. 125

Queen Arabella's eyes flashed. "So *you* released my Bumblesnook! I had heard you were seen leading Mittens out of the palace, but when you were back straightaway, I didn't believe it. I should have paid better attention to what my loyal friends told me. Clearly you, Destroyer, are not among them." 130

I said nothing. I should have known Queen Arabella would discover the truth. She DID love me. And now she would know she could trust me to look out for *her* best interests, not only mine. 135

Destroyer turned on his best puppy eyes, but Queen Arabella called out, "Guards!" Immediately, he was surrounded. "Take my former dog to the home of forgotten cats," she commanded. She grimaced. "He can clean up the trash."

As the guards dragged Destroyer away, he howled miserably. 140

“I was afraid I couldn’t make it back to you,” I said, as Queen Arabella carried me into the palace. “I feared I couldn’t protect you.”

“But you *did* protect me,” Queen Arabella said. “Mittens, you should have more faith in yourself! Don’t you know what can happen when you trust your heart?” 145

“What?” I asked.

Queen Arabella stroked me gently. “Magic. There is a true magic when you believe in yourself. You can do anything you dream of.” Her smile widened. “There’s also a magic in working together. I believe that *together* we can destroy the prince.” She rang for a servant. “Bring Mittens a dish of caviar-topped ice cream at once! We have PLOTTING to do!” 150

Text 2 (Video)

“Runaway”

This video can be found online at:

<http://kidsloveshortfilms.com/portfolio/runaway-a-short-animation-for-kids/>

“Runaway” is a charming, short animation about a misunderstanding between a man named Stanley and his treasured 1950’s refrigerator named Chillie. A sad event sends Chillie into a whirlwind of emotional turmoil, and as a result, he runs away.