

**Is *Watership Down* just a book about bunnies??** On the surface, yes, but as is the case in all allegories, it is QUITE possible that Richard Adams was discussing more than a rabbit tale.

*Watership Down* tells the story of a group of rabbits who are forced from their warren. In this story, Hazel (who is NOT a girl), our protagonist, has a little brother named Fiver (his name is pronounced “five- er” ...like the number five). Fiver has horrific — and as later events prove, accurate — visions of the destruction of their home warren at Sandleford, but Hazel can't convince their Chief Rabbit to pay attention to his “crazy” brother, so he persuades a few of his friends to join him in leaving their homes to escape. Of note are Bigwig, one of the community's Owsla (a sort of Royal Guard), and Blackberry, who is, by the standards of their tribe, a mechanical genius. For instance, he is the only rabbit to even come close to understanding basic physics... like, for instance, "floating on water." Caution is a way of life for these rabbits because death is a moment-to-moment possibility. They can't count past four because they only have four paws. They have their own words for everything (**check the glossary in the back of the book!**) and they don't understand things like cars or trains, which they think are just HUGE animals. They don't understand visual art, or human speech, or any of the strange things humans do.

Only Blackberry, Fiver, and Hazel can really "think outside the hutch," so to speak. Hazel in particular quickly realizes that their survival as a tribe of *hlessil* (nomads) will require problem-solving and teamwork, and thus becomes the leader of the group, with a particular talent for bringing out the best in his followers and earning their loyalty in return. Under Hazel's leadership, the rabbits begin their Hero Journey (more on that later).

Their journey is long and punctuated by times of rest, during which they share stories. Whether in danger or in celebration, it is their nature to tell their stories. You see, in rabbit culture, just as in ours, myths and stories are important. To this end, Adams adds one more character into his story: Dandelion. Most often, it is Dandelion who is called upon to share stories with the others. These rabbit stories and myths concern the adventures of El-ahrairah, their folk hero, the Prince With a Thousand Enemies. El-ahrairah is a trickster hero (somewhere between one of the avengers and Bugs Bunny, if that helps you imagine his personality). Please don't think that these El-ahrairah stories are just separated breaks from the “real story” of the rabbit's adventures, because they build up an intricate belief system. Through these stories the rabbits pass on their beliefs to their young, provide a moral framework for their society, and protect themselves against those who would attack their way of life.

It is important to note that the idea of *Watership Down* began with a story that Adams told his daughters long before he entertained thoughts of publishing. He told them of Hazel's diplomacy and his just leadership of his faithful band even in the face of danger. He told them of Bigwig's courage, and sense of duty to his fellow rabbit. Through Blackberry's ingenuity, Pipken's loyalty, Kehaar's friendship, and Holly's *esprit de corps* (pride and loyalty), he showed characteristics that he wanted his young daughters to mimic.

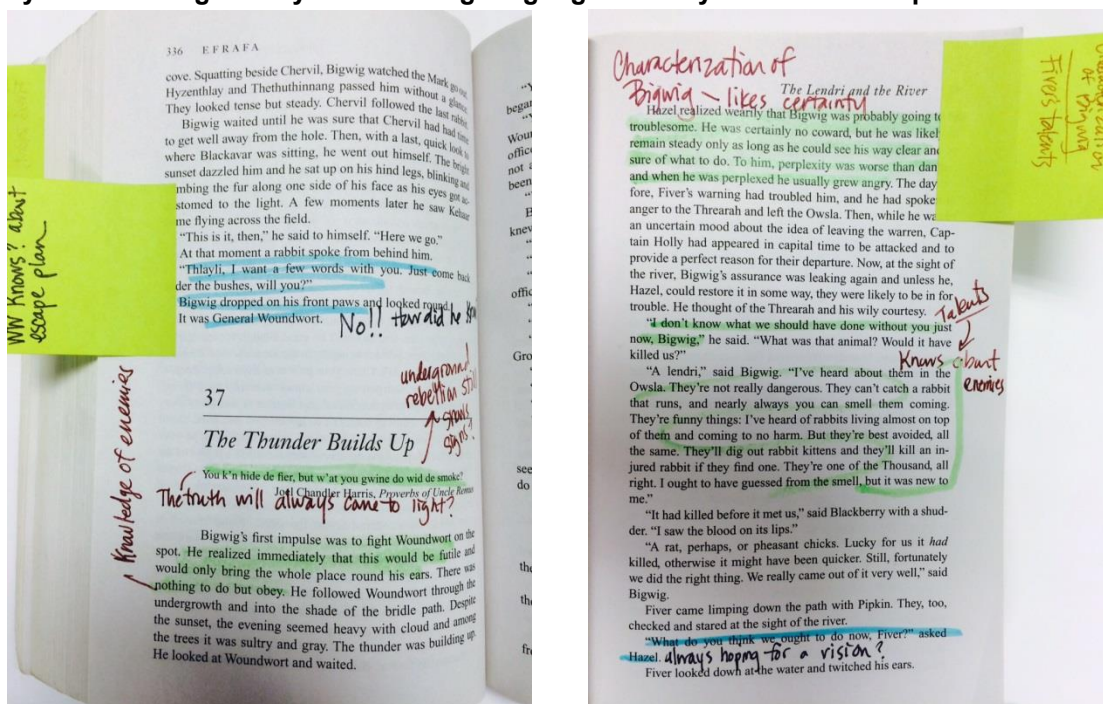
Bibliography:

<http://ashbrook.org/publications/guest-06-policz-watershipdown/>

<http://eolit.hrw.com/hlla/novelguides/hs/Mini-Guide.Adams.Water.pdf>

<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Literature/WatershipDown>

Reading in a purposeful way is a one of our goals. You'll need to begin annotating as you read. This involves marking (highlighting) things that stand out, then adding a post-it note to help you find the page you need later. You can mark things that are confusing, interesting, foreshadowing, etc. Mark anything you want to ask the teacher or think you might need for discussions, assignments, etc. Some pages may have several things while others may have nothing or very little. Don't go highlighter crazy! Here are examples of annotated pages:



As you read, please take notes, address and annotate instances that address, support, prove (etc) EACH of the 6 topics below. You must be able to show thoughtful evidence for each concept below.

1. Each chapter begins with a quotation (some not even in English...translate those ☺). Pick a quote from the beginning of one of the chapters in each part of the novel (for a total of 4 quotes); explain the quote's relevance.
2. The rabbits have a strong storytelling tradition. Consider the stories that rabbits tell. What do they reveal to us?
3. Most people agree that "two heads are better than one," so to speak. The rabbits seem to believe this is true as well. Many tasks are accomplished by using the strengths of many different rabbits, not just that of "the leader." How would the story of the rabbits been different if they didn't believe this statement?
4. Most works of literature include a clearly defined hero. A common theme in hero stories is "a hero's journey." Each hero experiences a call-to-action (something that makes the hero want to *do something* to solve a problem), a journey (the quest that the hero must achieve; his goal), dangers (problems, obstacles, and threats that must be met and overcome), a victory, and a time when the story is shared with others (making the hero a legend). Is this true in *Watership Down*?
5. Literary characters fall into certain categories. They are either static or dynamic and they are either round or flat. Explore which characters might fit in each of the categories.

Here are some videos that explain what these terms mean:

Static vs. Dynamic:

Video 1 <http://www.mtnbrook.k12.al.us/Page/10239>

Round vs. Flat:

Video 1 <http://www.mtnbrook.k12.al.us/Page/10241>

Video 2 <http://www.mtnbrook.k12.al.us/Page/10240>

Here's a very common mistake: characters are often round and dynamic, that does not mean these two terms mean the same thing. One refers to a character's complexity, while the other refers to a character's development over time.

6. Who do you think is the most qualified leader (any character) and why? Who would be the worst? Why?