

Coraline Study Guide

Coraline by Neil Gaiman

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Plot Summary

Bravery, love and the meaning of happiness are all themes in the children's book *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman. While exploring her new home, Coraline finds a locked door that at first appears to lead nowhere. This door, however, starts Coraline on a journey that helps her discover her own bravery. She saves her mother and father, as well as three children, from the grips of an evil creature who has created a reverse universe beyond that locked door.

Coraline fancies herself an explorer as she spends her first weeks in her new home checking out every inch of the grounds. One rainy day, Coraline discovers a locked door as she explores the inside of her home. Her mother shows her this door has been bricked up and leads nowhere, but Coraline finds herself drawn to it. One day when her parents are both away from home, she unlocks the door and discovers that the bricks are gone. She walks through to an apartment just like hers. A woman and man who describe themselves as her other mother and other father treat her well and try to get her to stay. They tell her that in order for her to stay in their world, she must allow them to sew black buttons over her eyes. She refuses and leaves.

When Coraline returns to her world she finds that her parents are missing. A black cat whom she befriended in the other world, shows her that her parents have been trapped by the other mother. Coraline realizes she must draw on her own bravery to re-enter the other mother's world in order to rescue her parents. Once back in the other mother's world, Coraline meets three children who had been lured to stay with the other mother years ago. Coraline agrees to find the souls of these children so they can find peace.

In order to perform the rescues, Coraline proposes a challenge to the other mother. If Coraline can find the souls of the three children and locate her parents, the other mother will allow them all to go free. Using her intelligence and her common sense, Coraline searches the house to find the souls of all three children. Using a cat she has befriended as interference, Coraline grabs a snow globe that she realizes contains her parents and gets everyone, including the cat, out. Unfortunately, the other mother's right hand is caught in the door and severed. It wreaks havoc in Coraline's world trying to find the key to the door so it can return home. In her final act of bravery, Coraline sets up a trap to catch the hand. Her trap sends the hand and key tumbling into an abandoned well from which Coraline hopes they will never emerge.



I

Summary

Coraline and her parents move into a big, old house that has been divided into different apartments. Two old ladies — Miss Spink and Miss Forcible — live below Coraline and her family while an old man who claims to be training mice for a circus lives above them. Coraline spends the first two weeks she lives in the house exploring the garden and grounds. She finds the old tennis court, a well, rockery and rose garden.

One day it is raining and Coraline cannot go outside. She asks her mother what she should do but is not happy with any of her suggestions. She entertains herself for a while by watching a television program about animals and protective coloration, but really wants to explore. Her father tells her to explore the inside of the house. Coraline finds the home's water heater, and counts the windows and doors. She notices one door won't open. She questions her mother about this locked door. Her mother tells her it doesn't go anywhere and proves it by unlocking the door. When it is open Coraline can see the opening has been blocked up. Coraline notices her mother closes the door, but doesn't lock it.

Later that night after Coraline has gone to bed, she wakes to a strange creaking noise. She gets up and looks down the hall but doesn't see anything. She has just about decided she dreamed the noise when she sees something move. She follows it to the drawing room. The shadow runs from under the sofa to the corner of the room where the blocked up door is located. When she turns on the light, Coraline sees the door has been opened a crack. She closes the door and goes back to bed. She dreams about small black shapes with red eyes and sharp yellow teeth. These creatures sing to her.

Analysis

Coraline is a girl who loves to explore, and hates to have her name mispronounced. She and her family, which consists of her mother and father, have just moved into a new apartment. The apartment is part of a big, old house that has been divided into several apartments. One day while exploring her new home, Coraline discovers that one of the doors opens, but doesn't lead anywhere. The opening is bricked closed. Coraline notices her mother shuts the door after they investigate it but that she doesn't lock it. Later that night, Coraline believes she sees a dark shape disappear in the corner of a room where this door is located.

One thing to notice in this novel is that it is set in England and uses English terms. The apartment, for instance, is called a flat. What would commonly be called a cabinet in America is called a cupboard in the England. The sentences are additionally often short. Those that aren't short are broken up with commas to make the ideas more manageable for children.



The author uses personification to describe the rain in this section of the novel it is described as being the type of rain that “threw itself down.” Simile is used to describe the way Coraline’s shadow looks as she enters the drawing room. From her shadow, it is noted that Coraline appears to be a thin giant woman.

Also important to note in this section is that although Coraline’s parents are at home with her, they appear to be busy working from home. She visits both her mother and her father as they work. Both of them shoo Coraline away, suggesting she go bother the neighbors or find something to do to keep herself occupied. They ask only that she not make a mess. It appears her parents’ inattention to her might be significant in the remainder of the novel. Remember also the television program about protective coloration that Coraline found interesting. What she learned in this program will help her in the end of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

What type of child is Coraline? Use examples from the book to support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

How does the author begin to build up mystery in this first chapter of the book? What tone does he appear to be trying to set?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the old bricked up door thus far?

Vocabulary

rockery, squidgy, trod, coloration, expedition, scuttled



II

Summary

The following day, the rain has stopped and Coraline is able to go out exploring again. A thick fog covers everything. Outside, she meets Miss Spink walking her dogs. Next, she sees Miss Forcible who asks if she's seen Miss Spink. The old man from upstairs also greets Coraline. He tells her that his mice have given him a message for her: they have said for her to not go through the door.

Inside, Coraline asks her mother what she should do to entertain herself. Her mother suggests she draw. Coraline tries to draw the mist. She checks the old door in the drawing room and finds it is locked again. In her father's study, her father tells her to go away before she's even said anything to him. He suggests she go downstairs and bother Miss Spink and Miss Forcible. She takes his suggestion. The ladies invite her inside and serve her tea. Then they continue a discussion of whether they could still get acting jobs or not. Miss Spink offers to read Coraline's fortune as told by her tealeaves. She says the tealeaves in the bottom of Coraline's cup say that she is in danger. Miss Forcible takes a look and agrees. Miss Spink gives Coraline a stone with a hole in it. She tells Coraline this might help with the bad luck. Coraline is a little excited thinking there might be danger coming.

Analysis

Suspense continues to build in these chapters. The fog that cloaks the outdoors gives the story an eerie, almost surreal tone. It is against this backdrop that Coraline learns from her downstairs neighbors that she is in danger. Coraline seems to be a little excited by the idea that there is danger in her future. Since she considers herself an explorer, the idea of danger appeals to Coraline and excites her. Miss Spink then gives Coraline a stone believed to have protective powers. Notice that Miss Spink and Miss Forcible determine Coraline is in danger by reading the pattern the tealeaves make in Coraline's teacup. This tradition of determining one's future by reading things such as tealeaves is rooted in superstition. Superstition also leads Miss Spink to believe the stone she has given Coraline will help to keep her safe.

Adding to the suspense is the mice's warning to Coraline not to go through the door. The old man upstairs delivers this message, but doesn't have any idea what the message means. The old man warns the mice are often wrong as he tells her that the mice are often wrong. For instance, he says, the mice have told him he's been mispronouncing Coraline's name. Because the mice are right in this instance, he has been mispronouncing Coraline's name, it makes one wonder if the mice are right about more things than the old man realizes.



The author continues his use of metaphor. He describes the wrapped up Miss Spink as looking “like a fluffy egg.” In the final sentences of the chapter it is noted the mist “hung like blindness.” This mist is used to build the creepy tone of the novel as it makes Coraline think of her world as a ghost world.

Again in this section Coraline’s parents basically ignore her when she comes to them looking for attention. Her mother encourages her to draw. Her father tells her to go away before she has even had a chance to say anything to her. Although they may seem short with Coraline, they probably aren’t intentionally so. It seems more likely they are busy with their work and believe they don’t have time to pay full attention to their daughter.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think the warning the mice give to Coraline means?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it significant that the old door in the drawing room is locked again when Coraline checks it?

Discussion Question 3

How accurate do you think a future told by reading tealeaves might be? Research how this manner of telling the future is done.

Vocabulary

circular, cautiously, shrugged, frenzied, shortsightedly



III

Summary

When Coraline and her mother go shopping for school supplies, her mother will not let her get Day-Glo green gloves. Instead, she buys her clothes like everybody else has. On their way home, Coraline asks her mother about the empty flat. Her mother tells her only that it probably looks like their apartment before they moved into it. She adds there's no way to get to it from their house.

At home, Coraline chooses to stay at home while her mother goes shopping. She gets the key to the door in the drawing room and opens it even though she senses what she is doing is wrong. This time, the bricks are gone and Coraline is able to walk into a hallway like the one in her own apartment. She notices while the carpet and wallpaper is the same, the boy in the picture in the hallway has a sinister expression on his face. A voice, like her mother's, calls her from the kitchen.

The woman is taller and thinner than her mother with long fingers and red fingernails. She says she is as Coraline's other mother. She tells Coraline to get her other father for lunch. The food tastes wonderful. Her other mother tells her they've been waiting a long time for her. After lunch, Coraline's other mother suggests she go to her room to play with the rats. Coraline believes her bedroom is much more interesting than the one at home. The rats build a pyramid and sing a song Coraline recognizes but can't remember where she heard it before.

After the song, the rats run to the other crazy old man from upstairs who has appeared in the doorway. They hide in his clothing. He offers to let her come upstairs to watch the rats eat. She declines, saying instead she wants to go outside and explore. Her other parents tell her they will wait for her to come back. Before she goes outside, Coraline looks back. Her other parents are still watching her, waving.

Analysis

The story gets really strange at this point. Coraline takes the opportunity while her parents are away to explore the bricked up door in the drawing room. When she opens the door this time, however, there are no bricks and she is able to walk directly into an apartment she thinks at first is just like her own. Soon, she realizes everything in the second apartment is opposite that in the first.

The boy in the picture on the wall looks like he wants to do something nasty to the bubbles he's watching. Her parents look like aliens with long thin bodies and big black button eyes. The woman tells her they are her other parents. Unlike her real parents, these parents pay attention to Coraline. They notice when she says she plans to go outside and watch her as she leaves as if they will miss her. This is different from her real parents who seemed eager to get her out from under their feet. The other mother



cooks food that she likes instead of the tasteless or strange recipes that her father puts together. Although her room is painted strange hues of pink and green, it is filled with interesting figurines. Instead of mice, the man upstairs has rats. The man upstairs even pronounces her name correctly.

In two different places in this chapter, Coraline gets a strange feeling that things aren't right. The first time is when she unlocks the strange door after her parents have both left the house. She ignores this feeling and goes ahead with her exploring. The second time is when the old man upstairs asks her if she wants to come with him and watch as he feeds his rats. This time she follows her feeling and decides to go outside exploring instead of going with him.

Notice in this section that the song the rats sing is similar to the one heard by Coraline in the first chapter of the novel. It can be assumed that it was one of these rats the she might have seen that first night after she and her mother opened the bricked up door. Also notice the description of the air that comes out when Caroline first opens the door. She indicates the air smells old and slow. While it probably makes sense that air could smell old, the idea of air smelling like something slow is an interesting mix of descriptions.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Coraline's real family and her other family. How are they different? How are they alike?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Coraline go through the door even though she's been warned not to?

Discussion Question 3

What is the attitude of Coraline's parents toward her? How does she seem to feel about them?

Vocabulary

refused, native, triumphantly, inherited, peculiar

IV

Summary

Outside, Coraline notices the only major difference in the house is that theater lights surround the doorway to Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's apartment. She hears a noise and turns around to see the black cat. He speaks to her and tells her he is not the other cat, but himself. She asks his name but he tells her cats don't need names because they know who they are, unlike people. Coraline thinks the cat is haughty but asks how it got there. It demonstrates, going behind a tree, where it disappears. The cat reappears behind her and suggests she should hold onto the protection that she has brought with her. Before Coraline can question it further, it runs off into the woods.

Coraline next knocks on Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's door. The door opens and she steps into a theater. The usher, a Scottie dog, lets her in even though she doesn't have a ticket. As she looks around, the others in the theater are not people, but dogs. Miss Spinks and Miss Forcible come on stage and perform some tricks before unzipping their large, old bodies to reveal younger versions of themselves. They have black button eyes. They choose Coraline as a volunteer. Miss Forcible throws a knife at a balloon over Coraline's head. Coraline is given a box of chocolate as a gift. She gives the chocolate to the dogs in the theater when they ask for it. She leaves the theater after just a short time. Her other parents are waiting for her in the garden. They tell her if she wants to stay there forever she can. They lead her to the kitchen where there is thread and two big black buttons. She tells them she is going and walks back through the door. When she turns around in her own apartment, the doorway is blocked by bricks again.

Analysis

Coraline continues to discover differences between her real home and the other home once she is outside. First, the cat talks to her. It is still haughty, and doesn't give her much information she can use, but he does talk. They have a discussion about names in which the cat indicates that only lower creatures, like humans, need names to identify themselves. His speech and attitude toward Coraline indicate that he believes he is superior to her.

Once she is inside Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's apartment in the other world, Coraline finds the apartment is actually a theater. Miss Spink and Miss Forcible are the actresses in a strange theater where they appear as much younger versions of themselves. The two also have black button eyes like Coraline's other parents. In this other world, it is the dogs, like the ones that live with the real Miss Spink and Miss Forcible that serve as the ushers for the theater. Coraline is the only human in the audience. The remainder of the theater goers are dogs. Remember when Coraline entered Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's apartment the first time she noted it smelled like dogs and furniture polish. In the other place the apartment smells like dust and velvet.



Notice the cat references the stone that Miss Spink and Miss Forcible has given Coraline. He tells her that it is a good idea that she has brought this form of protection with her. Because Coraline has the stone in her pocket, it is unsure how the cat might have known she had it with her. Notice also that when Coraline grips the stone in her pocket, her other mother removes her hand from Coraline's shoulder. The description indicates her fingers moved off like a "frightened spider" this wording may indicate that Coraline's other mother is in some way affected by the power of the stone that Coraline has.

Before Coraline leaves her other parents' home, they try to convince her to stay with them. They show her a china plate with black buttons they apparently intend to sew onto her in order to make her like them. They saw she must let them do this before she can stay for good. Following her instinct that these two intend to do her harm, Coraline leaves and returns to her own apartment.

Discussion Question 1

What things are different between Coraline's home and her other home? Is anything similar?

Discussion Question 2

How does the stone that Miss Spink and Miss Forcible gives Coraline seem to be protecting her already?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think that Coraline's other parents intended to do to her with the black buttons?

Vocabulary

theatrical, specimens, exotic, deferential, anteroom, nimbly, addendum

V

Summary

In Chapter Five, Coraline's parents have still not returned when she comes back from her visit to her other family. The next morning, they still haven't come home. She visits Miss Spink and Miss Forcible telling them her parents are missing but they don't seem to notice what she is telling them. Her parents still haven't come home at bedtime. Coraline wakes in the night and goes to her parents' room. They still aren't there. She gets into their bed and cries herself to sleep.

The cat wakes her up. He can't talk but blinks when Coraline asks if he knows where her parents are. It leads her to a mirror in which she can see her parents. Her mother blows fog on the mirror and writes the words "help us." The cat indicates they are trapped in the other world. Coraline calls the police station, but the police don't take her seriously.

Coraline knows she has to go back through the door to the other world. Before she unlocks the door, she tells the cat a story about a time that she and her father went exploring behind their old house. At one point, her father had stopped and told her to run away. They had apparently stepped on a wasp nest. Coraline was stung only once because her father had stayed with the wasps and gotten stung nearly 40 times to keep the wasps from stinging Coraline. He said he didn't think he had been brave because he had stayed with the bees, but that he did think he was brave when he went back to the bees to get his glasses.

After she finishes her story, Coraline and the cat walk through the doorway. A wind blows out the candle she has brought with her. Suddenly an electric light comes on and she sees what she believes is her real mother standing in front of her but it turns out to be her other mother. Coraline makes her decision to be brave and tells her other parents that she wants her real parents back. Her other mother suggests her parents left her, claiming they have done nothing with them. She shows Coraline a vision in the mirror of her real parents returning from a vacation, happy because they no longer have to take care of Coraline. When Coraline tells the woman she doesn't believe her, the woman orders a rat to bring her the key to the door. She locks the door from her side and puts the key in her apron pocket.

After her other parents go back to bed, Coraline goes outside. She meets the cat who suggests she challenge her other mother as that type of creature likes games and challenges. He also suggests she get some sleep. In her bedroom, Coraline puts a toy box in front of the door hoping the noise of someone trying to get into the room will wake her. She falls asleep before she has much time to think about what sort of challenge she might offer her other mother.



Analysis

Central to this chapter and a major theme for the novel is Coraline's description of bravery. Although the cat seems uninterested in her story, Coraline makes the point that bravery is not the absence of fear. She decides to be brave. It isn't something that just happens. Bravery, instead, comes from being afraid but doing what one knows needs to be done anyway. Coraline proves to herself that she is brave when she re-enters the other world to demand the return of her parents.

The cat is an interesting character in this story. Coraline had first met this cat in her own world where it was haughty and distant. In the other world, the cat has the ability to speak. In its speech, it shows it is not only haughty but also arrogant. Even though the cat is arrogant and belittles Coraline, it also helps her as it shows her where her parents are, and suggests that Coraline propose a challenge to her other mother in order to get them back. It seems the author of the novel at some point studied the personalities and attitudes of cats as this portrayal is right on mark.

Notice the way the adults in this section react to Coraline when she tells them her parents are missing. She tells Miss Spink and Miss Forcible that her parents have not come home yet. The two either do not hear her or do not understand the significance of what Coraline is trying to tell them. When the cat proves to Coraline that her parents have been kidnapped, Coraline calls the police. The officer who answers Coraline's call does not take her seriously either. He suggests she get a cup of hot chocolate. The way the adults in Coraline's life react to her predicament show her that she must find her parents on her own.

Once Coraline is back in the other mother's world, notice that Coraline already does not trust the other mother. She shows Coraline a fake vision to explain where her parents have been. In this vision Coraline's parents return from a vacation and talk about how glad they are that Coraline is gone. Coraline, however, knows her parents better than this and does not believe her parents would treat her in the way that the other mother claims they have. Notice also that once Coraline shows she is not gullible and willing to believe everything the other mother tells her, the other mother begins treating her roughly, taking the key from her so that she cannot return to the real world.

Discussion Question 1

How is bravery described in this chapter of the novel? Do you think this description is on point?

Discussion Question 2

Why can the cat not talk in the real world when it can in the other world?



Discussion Question 3

What kind of challenge do you think the cat believes Coraline should give to her other parents?

Vocabulary

expedition, lure, nefarious, fiendish, relish, trivialities, insinuating, parody, dislodge



VI

Summary

Coraline wakes up in her bed in her other bedroom, not sure where she is or who she is for just a minute. She looks in her closet for clothes, but finds nothing but costumes. When she locates a dresses in a pair of black jeans and sweater, then puts the stone with the hole in her jeans pocket, her head seems to clear. She can't find her other mother. Her other father says she's out fixing gates and doors to keep the cat out. He says he's not supposed to talk to Coraline while the other mother is gone, but does let it slip that it was she who created the other world. Since he won't talk to her anymore, she goes to the drawing room and tries to open the door but it is locked. The only thing different in this room from her room at home is a snow globe on the mantel.

Coraline next goes outside. She walks off the grounds until she is surrounded by a pale nothingness. The cat appears beside her asking her what she is doing. As they continue to walk, Coraline notices a dark shape ahead, which she believes is another building, but soon realizes she has just walked back to the same house. As the cat tells her the woman has had the place for a very long time, a rat runs by. The cat catches it, telling Coraline the rats are spies for the woman and report back to her all that they see and hear.

Coraline leaves the cat playing with the rat and goes back inside her other apartment. Her other mother suggests they play games together but Coraline refuses. Her mother comments on Coraline's ingratitude but says she believes Coraline can be won over with love. She offers Coraline a treat, which turns out to be blackbeetles, from a bag. When the other mother begins eating the beetles, she tells her that she is sick and weird. The other mother pulls a tiny silver key out of her apron pocket and takes Coraline to the hall mirror, telling her she will teach her some manners. She uses the key to unlock the mirror, displaying a small room into which she locks Coraline.

Analysis

In this chapter of the novel, Coraline learns from her other father that her other mother was the one who created this other world. As a creation of the other mother, notice that the other father has begun to look less distinct without his maker around. Apparently he works as her puppet, only doing and saying what she wants him to do and say. He tells Coraline that while the other mother is away, he is not supposed to talk to Coraline. Coraline goes outside and attempts to walk away from the other mother's world. She learns there is an extent to the creative power of the other mother. What she has created does not go very far beyond the grounds of the house. The further Coraline walks from the house, the more distorted and deformed the creations become.



Although the cat continues to act arrogantly toward Coraline, he seems in some way to also want to protect her. For instance, when she goes exploring out into the nothingness that her other mother has not yet created, the cat shows up at her side. He is obviously unhappy about the nothingness, but he is there. He explains to Coraline, in his conceited manner, that the other mother's universe is very small. For all his conceit, the cat is considered a varmint in the other mother's world because he catches and kills the rats. Unlike in the regular world, the rats are not varmints but instead act as spies for the other mother. The other mother dislikes the cat because he kills the rats, keeping them from reporting back to her.

Coraline's interactions with the other mother in this section of the novel continue to indicate she has no intention of being swayed but the creature's attempts to be nice to her. Coraline refuses the "treat" her other mother offers her even before she sees that what the woman considers a treat is really a bag full of bugs. When Coraline talks back to the other mother, the woman punishes her by locking her in a small closet like space behind a mirror.

Discussion Question 1

What do you think Coraline's other mother means when she says that mirrors are never to be trusted?

Discussion Question 2

Consider the character of the cat. Is he a friend or a foe to Coraline?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think the other father is not supposed to talk to Coraline when the other mother is not around?

Vocabulary

vague, hospitality, splodge, motes, ingratitude

VII

Summary

Coraline holds back tears as she explores the small, broom closet sized room in which her other mother has imprisoned her. Her hand comes in contact with a cold cheek and lips. A voice tells her to be quiet. A cold hand feels her face and Coraline is asked if she is alive. She asks for names but the voices say they remember their names. The children tell her they don't even think about whether or not they are boys or girls. Caroline learns the children were left there by the other mother who stole their hearts, stole their souls, took their lives away and then forgot about them. One of the voices tells her that it walked through a scullery door where her other mother was waiting for her. It never saw its real mother again. All of the voices tell her to run away. Coraline tells them she's come to get her real mother and father back. The children suggest that if she can get her mother and father back, maybe she could free their souls as well.

Coraline pulls off her sweater to use as a pillow. She believes the other mother will not leave her in the closet for much longer as she is not much of a challenge to her while she is locked up. Before she goes to sleep, Coraline feels one of the children kiss her on the cheek, and then tell her to look through the hole in the stone she carries.

Analysis

In this section Coraline learns that she is not the first person to fall prey to the other mother. It appears that through the years, this cruel creature has captured at least three other children. Based on their speech patterns and their own description of their clothing it appears these children were abducted many, many years before Coraline. The children tell Coraline the other mother has taken everything from them including their souls and hearts. They are not even sure any longer if they are girls or boys. While the other mother had thought that locking Coraline in the closet behind the mirror would serve as a punishment, the act has actually let Coraline know for sure that her future will be anything but bright if she stays with the other mother. The children beg Coraline to run away from the other mother. They suggest also that if she can find her mother and father, she can also find their souls. Coraline agrees to try to help the children as best she can.

Discussion Question 1

How did the other children become prey to the other mother?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that one of the children tells Coraline to look through the hole in the stone?

Discussion Question 3

What has the other mother taken away from the children in the closet? What, if anything, do they have left?

Vocabulary

imprisoned, beldam, embers, scullery, peradventure, shrivel



VIII

Summary

The other mother comes through the mirror, lifts Coraline and takes her into the kitchen. She tells Coraline that she has paid for her crime and that she won't be punished again if she is compliant from that point forward. As the other mother makes a cheese omelet for Coraline, Coraline mentions the other children. The other mother only smiles and tells Coraline she's being silly when Coraline suggests she plans to turn Coraline into a husk like the other children.

Coraline proposes a game where the other mother can win her fair and square. If Coraline wins, however, the other mother must let everyone — Coraline, her parents and the other children — free. Coraline states the objective, that she must find her parents and the souls of the children in order to be set free. Her other mother swears on her right hand that she will keep her end of the bargain.

Coraline begins looking inside the house, knowing the outside is not real. As she is looking around the kitchen and hinting around at how big a soul might be, Coraline's other mother disappears. She holds the stone in front of her face as she walks toward the mirror and notices it is glowing like a green coal. A trail of green light leads toward her bedroom. She looks at the toys, but doesn't see anything that looks like a soul. As she looks, she thinks about the voice that told her to look through the stone. When she does, everything but the marble turns gray. The marble looks like a glowing ember. The voice of one of the children speaks to her, telling her there are two left to find. Coraline decides to change back into her own clothes before continuing her search.

She goes downstairs to Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's flat. The theater is empty and decaying. She notices a large white sac on the stage that seems to contain a meld of Miss Spink and Miss Forcible. When she looks through the stone, there is a glow coming from the sac. She reaches inside the sac and pulls out the second soul. A girl's voice warns her to flee. Coraline runs from the theater.

Analysis

The cat had suggested to Coraline in a previous chapter that the way for Coraline to get her parents back might be to make a deal with the other mother. In this chapter Coraline finally comes up with a challenge she believes will be adequate and proposes it to the other mother. At this point, note that Coraline has no idea where the souls of the children are hidden, what they might look like or how she might go about finding them. She also has no idea where her parents are hidden.

Interesting in this chapter is the Coraline's refusal to accept the other mother's offer to swear on her mother's grave that she will let Coraline and the others go free if she succeeds in her challenge. In fact, Coraline seems to question the idea that the other



mother even has a mother. In what is ghastly, but humorous, the other mother tells Coraline she put her own mother in the grave, alive. She put her mother back when she found her trying to crawl out. This admission by the other mother indicates what a despicable creature Coraline is trying to deal with. Coraline is somewhat more satisfied when the other mother agrees to promise on one of her own body parts, her right hand. This seems to give the promise a base as the other mother now has something to lose if she goes back on her promise.

Notice the changes that have taken place in the other mother's world since Coraline was outside last. The apartment inhabited by the other Miss Forcible and Miss Spink is still outfitted like a theater, but not the theater is abandoned and dilapidated. The two women hang suspended in some sort of sac on the stage. It appears almost as if they have served their purpose for the other mother and have now been discarded by her. The dilapidation and lack of care is similar to the condition of the children that Coraline meets in the closet. The shape into which the other mother has allowed her own creation to fall is another example of the way the other mother does not truly care for anything, even her own creation.

Discussion Question 1

So far, hot chocolate has been mentioned several times in the story. What do you think this drink represents? Why will Coraline not drink the chocolate that her other mother makes for her?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Coraline is being fair to herself with the game that she outlines? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Do you have any idea where Coraline's parents might be hidden? Where do you think there are? Why do you think this?

Vocabulary

fetcher, compliant, petulantly, derelict, plasticine, encased



IX

Summary

Once Coraline is outside, she sees nothing but swirling mist. Her other mother is waiting for her. Coraline informs her that she has found two of the souls. The other mother tells Coraline she loves her but Coraline replies she does not want her type of love. The other mother offers a helping hand in finding the third soul in the form of a key that will open the other ground level apartment. A voice that belongs to one of the children warns Coraline that the other mother is probably trying to trick her. Coraline agrees, but unlocks the apartment and goes inside anyway.

The apartment is empty. Coraline finds only a trapdoor in the floor of what must have been the bedroom. This trapdoor leads into a cellar where she encounters the creature that was her other father. He tells her that the other mother is taking out her anger at Coraline on everyone. He warns her to run from the cellar as the other mother is trying to make him hurt her. She suggests to the creature that if he tries hard enough, he can be brave and resist her but the creature isn't that strong. To keep him from catching her, Coraline pulls off the one button eye that the creature has left. While he is groping blindly for her, Coraline runs up the stairs and slams the trapdoor shut.

Analysis

The author illustrates the eerie story by creating a landscape that changes to fit the other mother's emotions. Outside the house is only swirling mist and unformed objects. The house itself seems to be twisting and changing. It is almost as if the other mother needs to put all of her concentration into keeping the world she has created in proper form. When Caroline begins locating souls, it seems to distract the other mother to the point that the things she has created begin to deteriorate. This is the case with the creature the other mother made to represent Coraline's other father. Since he is no longer needed, and has probably told Coraline more than he should have, the other mother has locked him in the cellar of the house. Even though she has disposed of him, Coraline's other father is still under the other mother's control. He warns Coraline that the other mother is trying to get him to hurt Coraline. Although he does still try to keep Coraline from leaving the cellar, he has given her enough warning that she is able to anticipate his actions and trick him in order to get safely out of the cellar.

Bravery is a topic that comes up in this chapter as well. Coraline begs the creature, her other father, that she encounters in the cellar to try to be brave and resist the other mother's attempt to make him hurt Coraline. Coraline's other father says he cannot bring forth the bravery needed to resist the other mother. This encounter shows again that bravery is not something that is automatic. It is a characteristic that a person must be strong enough to decide they want to exhibit. As the other father is only a creation of the other mother, he does not have the willpower to make himself be brave.



Discussion Question 1

Did you suspect the other mother had an ulterior motive when she gave Coraline the key to the ground floor apartment? Why should Coraline not have taken the key?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author use words to make the setting of the novel parallel the other mother's emotional state?

Discussion Question 3

Why has the other mother thrown away the creature that was represented Coraline's other father?

Vocabulary

fury, miser, motes, acrid, revulsion



X

Summary

Coraline next goes upstairs to the apartment of the other crazy old man. She believes this flat will be worse even than the cellar. The apartment smells bad and is full of rats. The man speaks to her and Coraline encourages herself by reminding herself that the other mother cannot create anything but only twist real things. This thought makes Coraline wonder about the snow globe in the drawing room of her own flat.

The man calls her again, telling her nothing will have changed if she goes back to her own world. Another figure in the room begs her to stay with them saying she will have anything she wants there. Coraline tells him she realizes she won't be happy getting everything she wants. When she looks through the stone, Coraline sees a glow coming from the man's raincoat. As she walks toward the man, rats run in every direction and the man seems to fall apart. Coraline can't find a marble in the coat, but spots a rat running away with the marble in its paws.

Coraline tries to follow the rat out of the apartment but falls. When she gets up, the rat is gone. She feels like she is a failure. The sound of a cough makes her open her eyes. She sees the rat has been decapitated. The black cat is sitting with a paw on the marble. As she picks up the last marble, she hears a girl's voice whisper to her that even though she has the marble, the other mother will not let her go.

She tells the cat she isn't sure if the other mother will let her go, but hopes that she will see the cat again on the other side. As the house continues to flatten, the cat seems scared. It tells Coraline that all of the entrances to the real world have disappeared. Coraline picks that cat up, telling him that she will take him home. She carries the cat, the three marbles and the stone with a hole in it up the stairs into her other flat.

Analysis

Although his proposal is incorrect, the other crazy old man upstairs suggests to Coraline that if she stays in the other world, she will be able to have whatever she wants whenever she wants it. To a child, this proposal would be a tempting one, but having seen what has happened to the other children, Coraline realizes this will not be what life will be like if she stays with the other mother. Instead of arguing from that viewpoint, however, Coraline takes the more intellectual argument. Even as young as she is, Coraline realizes that just getting what one wants will not make one happy. She knows the things won't matter that much if she doesn't have to sacrifice and work to get them.

Also in this section, the cat comes to Coraline's rescue with what Coraline thought of in the past as a detestable habit. One of the rats in the crazy old man's apartment has grabbed the marble, the final soul, from her and taken off. It is suspected it is on its way to deliver the marble to the other mother. The cat, however, is waiting and impedes the



rat by removing its head and rescuing the soul. But notice in this section how quickly the cat's attitude changes when it realizes the other mother has closed off all its secret exits from the other world. Coraline notes that the cat even appears smaller as it realizes, for once, that it is at a disadvantage. Coraline takes the opportunity to take charge, telling the cat she will get them all back home.

The rats and the song they sing remind the reader of prior parts of the novel. It becomes obvious that it was these rats that Coraline heard scrabbling around in her apartment the first night after she and her mother unlocked the bricked-up door. The same rats also play with Coraline at the other mother's command during her first visit to the other world. The song the rats sing in all instances includes the same four-line abab rhyming sequence.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the change in the cat in this chapter of the novel. What has gotten him so scared?

Discussion Question 2

Considering what is known of the other mother up to this point, do you think she will keep her promise to Coraline? Why or why not? Support your answer with examples from the book.

Discussion Question 3

What does Coraline mean when she says it wouldn't be any fun to just get whatever she wanted? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

charity, exotic, tarragon, parody, decapitated



XI

Summary

The other mother is waiting for her when Coraline carries the cat back into the flat. She heads for the drawing room. Her other mother, who Coraline realizes now looks nothing like her real mother, asks where the souls are. When Coraline shows them to her, the other mother reaches out as if she plans to take them but Coraline puts them back in her pocket first. The other mother tells Coraline she still has to find her parents. Coraline adjusts the cat as she tells the other mother she believes her parents are trapped in the passageway between the real world and the other world. As the other mother opens the door, Coraline throws the cat at her, distracting her while she grabs the snow globe. The cat claws and bites the other mother as Coraline runs for the door. She calls for the cat and they both step into the corridor.

Coraline tries to pull the door shut even as the other mother pulls against her from the other side. The three children put their hands over hers. Even though they aren't strong enough to help her pull, Coraline begins to make progress on closing the door as the children urge her on. It is when her mother compliments her, telling her "well done" that Coraline is able to finish pulling the door closed. Something reaches at Coraline as she pulls the door shut. There is a moment of resistance, as if something is caught in the door, then the door closes. Coraline hears something drop but doesn't stay to find out what it was. The cat calls to her and the both of them run back along the corridor to Coraline's real flat. Something trips her, but she gets back up. In her own flat, she slams the door shut and locks it. The cat is crouched in the corner of the room, scared. Coraline apologizes to it. The cat licks her fingers, and then begins to purr. Coraline sits down in one of the drawing room chairs and the cat settles into her lap. Coraline soon goes to sleep.

Analysis

Coraline uses her entire being to outsmart the other mother. There are several ways in which the other mother tries to trick Coraline to which other children might fall prey. First, she asks to see the souls of the children. Coraline shows them, but closes her hand over them before the other mother can take them from her. Knowing that her mother and father are in the snow globe, she knows she can't look in that direction or she will alert the other mother that she knows where her parents really are. She has to play dumb in order to outsmart the evil creature. Although it isn't necessarily a willing participant the cat once again comes to the rescue in Coraline's escape from the other mother's world. Coraline knows she will need something to distract the other mother so she can get back into her world. The cat becomes the distraction.

Even though Coraline has used the cat very roughly, it makes friends with her once they are safely in the drawing room in the real world. The cat settles into her lap and purrs,



proving its friendship. Although the cat has been arrogant and demeaning to Coraline through most of their relationship, it appears the Coraline has proven herself to the cat by protecting and taking care of it when it had lost the ability to care for itself.

Note in this section the way the other mother's surroundings continue to transform according to her moods. After Coraline locates the third soul, the other mother is so angry that the outside of the house has flattened to the point that it looks like a drawing. In this flatness, the cat is no longer able to find any of the portals back to the real world. Once in the house, everything seems normal at first but there are some strange changes in the drawing room. Instead of a bowl of fruit in the painting on the wall, all that remains of the fruit is stems and cores. The lions' claw feet of the tables and chairs have come to life and are clawing at the floors as if in a desire to start working at Coraline.

Discussion Question 1

How does Coraline use the other mother's personality against her in order to get her to do what Coraline wants?

Discussion Question 2

What does the other mother do that confirms to Coraline that the other mother does not intend to keep her word? How does Coraline deduce the other mother's intentions?

Discussion Question 3

What do the changes in the drawing room furniture and painting signify?

Vocabulary

liable, provoked, ululating, insubstantial, wraiths



XII

Summary

Coraline's real mother wakes her up asking how she came to fall asleep in the drawing room and where the cat had come from. In her room, Coraline removes the three marbles, empty snow globe and iron key from her pocket. She hangs the key on a string around her neck. She goes into her father's study and hugs him from behind. He picks her up and carries her into the kitchen for dinner. She eats the pizza he's made even though it isn't the best.

That night, she dreams she is at a picnic with the three children whose souls she rescued. The children thank her and she tells them she's glad it's finished. The expressions on the children's faces show Coraline that her job is not done yet. They indicate that while they are safe, the other mother is still around to torment future victims. When Coraline wakes in the early morning, she hears something at her door. She wonders what it is, then opens her door to check the hall. She doesn't see anything so she opens the front door, wondering how long it will be before the sun rises. As she holds the door open, she hears a scuttling as the other mother's right hand scurries past her out of the house. She knows that it wants the key to the door.

Analysis

Significant in this section is Coraline's realization that the other mother's hand has made its way into her world. Apparently the hand was severed when the other mother was trying to reach through to grab Coraline as Coraline was pulling the door shut. The hand was probably what caused the resistance that Coraline felt as she was closing the door. It may also have been this hand that tripped Coraline up as she was walking in the corridor between the other world and her home. Significant also is the way Coraline reacts to her parents in this section of the novel. She voluntarily hugs them, eliciting returned affection from each of them. She also eats the food her father has prepared even though she doesn't think it is all that great.

Notice also Coraline's dream and its significance in her quest to retrieve the souls of the children so they could rest in peace. In her dream, she and the three children enjoy a celebration picnic together in which they honor Coraline as their savior. The picnic, however, is tinged with tension as Coraline comes to realize the children want her to come up with a way to put an end to the other mother so she cannot put any more children at risk. Coraline, who believed her job was finished, is filled with dread as she realizes more is expected of her. It is not until the following morning when Coraline hears something scurrying at her door, that she realizes the other mother's hand has followed her into the real world.



Discussion Question 1

How did the other mother's hand get into Coraline's house?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Coraline put the key on a string around her neck instead of returning it to the ledge where it belonged?

Discussion Question 3

How has Coraline's attitude toward her parents changed?

Vocabulary

alternately, deftly, immensely, circlet, winded

XIII

Summary

Caroline's parents never talk about the time they spent in the snow globe. Caroline believes they might have no idea they have lost two days. As for the marbles, Caroline put them under her pillow. When she returns to bed after seeing the other mother's hand, she hears a crunch from under the pillow and notices the marbles have shattered, like small birds' eggs. When Coraline visits Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, they read her tea leaves, saying it appears her danger is past. However, they can't understand the meaning of a strange clump of leaves that looks like a hand. She learns one of the ladies' dogs has been injured in what they believe was a fight. Coraline knows it was the other mother's hand and that she must do something. When she sees the crazy old man, he tells her something has scared the mice. He suspects a weasel but Coraline knows it is the hand.

The next morning, Coraline asks her mother for an old sheet she can use as a tablecloth. She sneaks off with a cardboard box, several dolls and a jug of water, taking the long way around to get back to the old abandoned well on the property. She removes the boards from the top of the well, and then puts the tablecloth over the well opening. She weighs the cloth down with dolls' cups filled with water. After she arranges her dolls around the well, she goes back to the house in a roundabout way.

She takes the key, which is on a string around her neck, and dangles it in her hand as if it is a plaything before knocking on Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's door. Coraline asks how Hamish is doing. She informs the ladies, loudly, that she will be playing with her dolls by the old tennis court. She also mentions the key she's holding, hoping the hand has heard her comments about the game and the key but not the mention of the old well by Miss Spink.

Coraline notices the hand following her as she makes her way to the old well. When she arrives, she tells her dolls that she has brought the lucky key, and lays the key in the center of the tablecloth, over the opening of the well. She tries to ignore the hand, which she sees skittering around in the trees. All of the sudden, the hand drops from the tree, aiming for the key but its weight takes it, the key and the tablecloth into the well. Coraline waits until she hears the splash, then pulls the boards back over the well.

The cat walks up to Coraline as she is completing the work, jumps up onto the well and winks one eye at Coraline. When she returns to the house, Mr. Bobo is waiting for her. He says the mice tell them she is their savior. Caroline then returns the stone to Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, giving them both hugs. Although the next day is her first day of school, Coraline is not apprehensive. As she goes to sleep that night, she believes she hears the sound of the mice in the upstairs apartment practicing their instruments.



Analysis

Coraline once again uses her intelligence and common sense to outsmart the other mother. She uses information she learned from a television show about protective coloration along with the warnings that Miss Spink and Miss Forcible gave her about the abandoned well on the grounds to devise a trap that will trap not only the hand but also put the key in a place where no other child can get to it.

Coraline comes through her adventure with a new respect for the people around whom she lives. One of the main people of whom she has a new understanding is the man whom she referred to as the crazy old man upstairs. She had been irritated in the past because this man did not pronounce her name correctly. It is not until she hears Miss Spink and Miss Forcible call the man upstairs by his name, Mr. Bobo, that Coraline realizes she never even bothered to learn his name. Even though Coraline has had her doubts that Mr. Bobo had a mouse band, at the end of the novel she believes that she hears these mice playing their little instruments as she goes to sleep.

The chapter opens with the mention that Coraline's parents never mention their time in the snow globe. Coraline chooses not to bring it up though it must have been a great task for a child Coraline's age not to mention that she'd saved her parents or to brag on herself. Coraline, however, comes to the conclusion that her parents, who she describes as being somewhat scattered, have not even noticed they've lost two full days in the real world.

Notice also that the bravery that Coraline has found in herself during her experience with the other mother has carried over to other parts of her life. Although she is about to start school in a new place, Coraline does not feel the apprehension she generally does just before school starts. She realizes after what has happened to her over the summer, there is nothing about school that can scare her any more.

Discussion Question 1

Does Coraline's attitude toward her neighbors change from before her encounter with the other mother to after this encounter? If yes, in what way does it change?

Discussion Question 2

How does Coraline's relationship with the cat change during the novel? What does this change in the relationship between these two signify?

Discussion Question 3

Considering that the other mother created her own world based on the house and grounds in which Coraline lived, how did she not know about the well?

Vocabulary

tutted, ambled, sauntered, ecstatically, wonderment



Characters

Coraline Jones

Coraline Jones is the heroine of the novel. She is a young girl, probably a preteen. She's old enough to know how to take care of herself for the day that her parents are missing, but young enough that she is scared and misses her parents. Coraline is very intelligent for her age. It is through her experience with the other mother, an evil creature whom she meets when she goes through a bricked up door in her new flat, that she realizes how brave she really is. During her experience, Coraline additionally realizes how much her parents really love her even though they may often be distracted by work, cook food for her that she doesn't like and won't let her buy Day-glo gloves.

Coraline befriends a black cat who helps her to navigate the other mother's world. In return for his help, Coraline brings the cat back to the real world after the other mother closes all of the secret openings the cat had been using. She also makes friends with Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, the spinster former actresses who live in the flat below her. These ladies tell Coraline she is in trouble when they read her tea leaves. The ladies give Coraline a stone with a hole in it that helps the girl not only find the souls of the children but also seems to help keep Coraline safe and her mind focused.

One of Coraline's most impressive traits is her ability to remain calm, think and come to intelligent responses to the challenges she faces. When she is in the other Mr. Bobo's apartment that man tries to convince Coraline to stay by telling her that in that world, she can have anything she wants whenever she wants. Coraline, however, realizes having what one wants is not necessarily a good thing. She's also smart enough to realize that the other mother does love her, but as a possession, not a person.

Coraline's Other Mother

Coraline's other mother is described to look like an alien might look. She's tall and slender with long fingers and hair that floats in the air like seaweed in water or wriggling snakes. She has eyes that look like huge black buttons. When Coraline first sees her other mother she believes she has some similarities to her real mother. Just before she takes the children's souls, her parents and the cat back to the real world, Coraline realizes that she can't believe she ever thought this creature looked anything like her real mother.

The other mother is an evil creature. She intentionally lures children into her world where she steals their hearts, souls and memories from them. As the children tell Coraline, she leaves them as empty shells. She has created a house and grounds similar to the one in which Corline lives with the exception that Coraline's room is filled with things she finds interesting. The other mother also tries to entice Coraline by cooking her the foods that she likes and offering her treats and extra attention. When



the other mother is angry, she takes out her anger on the things that she has created. For instance, she locks Coraline's bloated, deformed other father in the cellar when he tells Coraline too much about the other mother's creations.

The other mother agrees to release the children's souls, Coraline and Coraline's parents if Coraline can locate the three souls and her parents. When Coraline asks for proof that the other mother will let her and the others go free, the other mother first promises on her mother's grave. She proves how cruel a person she is when she tells Coraline that she put her mother in the grave when she was still alive, then put her back when she tried to crawl back out. Coraline is more satisfied when the other mother agrees to promise on her right hand, as it seems this promise might be more likely to stand since the other mother will actually have flesh in the deal.

The Black Cat

The black cat is a significant character in the novel because it helps Coraline to understand what kind of place the other mother has created and helps her to rescue the final child's soul. Even though the cat is very arrogant and pretends not to like Coraline, he shows by his actions that he is friendly. Notice that although the cat is referred in the novel only as "the cat" or "it," the cat appears to be a male because Coraline indicates his voice sounds like the voice in the back of her mind when she thinks to herself. The cat's voice, however, is a male voice.

When Coraline first sees the cat while she is exploring the grounds, he is haughty and will not allow her to play with him. Later, when they meet in the other mother's world, the cat initiates a conversation. When Coraline's parents disappear, it is the cat who tells her where they have gone. He even goes to the other mother's world with her to provide his sort of support to Coraline. Perhaps the biggest help the cat provides to Coraline is his act of killing the rat that has taken off with the marble that represents the third soul. The cat decapitates the rat and returns the marble to Coraline. This act is significant as she is stuck in the other mother's world if she is not able to locate all three of the children's souls.

A different, less arrogant side of the cat's personality is seen when the grounds in the other mother's world begin to flatten. The cat is frightened because all of its escape routes have suddenly disappeared. Coraline promises the cat she will get them all out safely but doesn't mention that part of her plan is to use the cat as a way to distract the other mother. Coraline later apologizes to the cat for throwing him at the other mother. The cat apparently accepts the apology as he curls up in her lap and purrs.

Miss April Spink and Miss Miriam Forcible

Miss April Spink and Miss Miriam Forcible are a pair of old ladies that live in the flat underneath the one that belongs to Coraline's family. Both of the ladies were theater actresses when they were younger. During one of her first visits to this pair of ladies, they read her future as determined by the tealeaves in the bottom of her cup. The ladies



determine Coraline is in grave danger and give her a stone with a hole in it for protection. Coraline uses this stone to help her locate the souls of the children that the other mother has imprisoned. In another visit with the ladies after Coraline has rescued her parents and the children, the pair again reads her leaves. This time they tell her she's no longer in danger but neither lady can determine the meaning of a clump of leaves that is in the shape of a hand. Coraline uses the ladies as a sounding board to let the other mother's hand know her plans for a doll's tea party so that the hand will follow her into the trap she has set for it.

Coraline's Other Father

Coraline's Other Father is a creation of her other mother. He is there only to help her convince Coraline that she would be better off in the other world. One day when the other mother leaves the other father and Coraline alone, he accidentally tells Coraline that the world in which he lives was created by the other mother. He also lets Coraline know that the other mother considers the black cat to be a varmint. Later in the story, the other mother locks the other father in a cellar because of her anger with Coraline. Coraline finds the other father when she is exploring the cellar in search of the children's souls. Although he doesn't want to do so, the other father tells Coraline that the other mother is pressuring him to hurt Coraline. Coraline tries to convince him he can be strong enough to resist the other mother's suggestions, but he tells her he cannot. Coraline escapes from him by pulling off his remaining button eye. While he is trying to locate her by sound, Coraline runs up the cellar steps and locks him inside.

Coraline's Mother

The biggest significance that Coraline's mother has in the novel happens when Coraline is trying to close the door against the strength of her other mother. When Coraline hears the voice of her mother telling her that she has done well, it gives her the added strength she needs to keep pulling the door shut. Coraline's mother isn't really neglectful of her, but just seems very busy and very distracted. The best example of this comes when she takes her daughter shopping. Coraline not only makes a play for Day-Glo green gloves, which her mother refuses to buy for her, but also makes up a story about being captured by aliens that her mother doesn't even seem to hear. Her mother also doesn't hear when Coraline says she doesn't need any more hairpins. Coraline seems to have a new appreciation for both her parents after she experiences her other mother's form of love.

The Rats

Although rats are considered varmints in the real world, they are valued pets to the other mother. Coraline learns from the cat that the rats act as spies for the other mother. They report everything they see and hear back to her. In the first visit that Coraline pays to the other mother's house, the other mother suggests to her that she go play with the



rats, as if this is a reward for Coraline. Based on the song that the rats sing to Coraline after they build a pyramid for her, it can be assumed that it was one of these rats that she heard scampering through her real house on the night after she and her mother unlocked the door in the drawing room.

The Other Mother's Right Hand

After Coraline saves her parents, and the souls of the three children from the other mother, the other mother's right hand manages to get out of the other world into Coraline's world. During its time in the real world, the hand wrecks havoc in its attempt to get the door key from Coraline. Coraline finds gouges in her bedroom window after she hears the hand scratching at the window one night. Hamish, one of Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's dogs, is attacked and injured by the hand. Mr. Bobo's mice know there is danger in the area and refuse to practice their instruments, Mr. Bobo tells Coraline.

Mister Bobo aka The Crazy Man Upstairs

Mister Bobo is a character who is not given a name until almost the end of the book. Through the first twelve chapters, Coraline refers to Mister Bobo as The Crazy Man Upstairs. Mister Bobo claims to be training mice for a circus. He passes along messages to Coraline from the mice. First, he tells her the mice say she should not go through the door. They also tell Mister Bobo, who insists on pronouncing Coraline's name Caroline, that he is mispronouncing her name. After Coraline has trapped the other mother's hand in the old well, the mice tell Coraline through Mister Bobo that she is their savior.

The Other Mister Bobo aka The Other Crazy Man Upstairs

Coraline encounters the other Mister Bobo when she goes to his apartment in her search for the souls of the three children that have been lured to stay in the other mother's world. While she is in his apartment, the other Mister Bobo tries to convince Coraline that she should stay in that world as nothing has changed in her world. He tries to persuade Coraline that if she returns to the real world, her parents will continue to ignore her and people will continue to pronounce her name wrong. Despite his best tries, Coraline ignores Mister Bobo's reasoning.

The Other April Spink and Miriam Forcible

In the other mother's world, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible are young actresses again. Coraline visits their theater during her first trip to see the other mother. When Coraline returns to the ladies' apartment in the other world to search for the children's souls, Miss



Spink and Miss Forcible have been melded together and trapped in some sort of spider's egg sac. Coraline locates the soul of one of the children hidden in this sac.

Coraline's Father

Coraline's father works at home on his computer. When Coraline tries to visit him in his office, he often tells her he is busy without even turning to look at her. Instead of playing with his daughter, he instead will tell her to go and bother the neighbors. It is at her father's suggestion that she explores the flat during one rainy day that Coraline discovers the bricked up door in the drawing room.

The Mice

Although they never appear in the book, the mice owned by the crazy man who lives in the apartment above Coraline and her family send two messages to Coraline through their owner. They first warn Coraline not to go through the doorway. Later, they hail Coraline as their savior when she traps the other mother's hand in an old well on the property.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Door

While Coraline is exploring the new flat into which she and her parents have moved, she discovers a carved wooden door in the drawing room that will not open. Her mother unlocks the door, showing her that the doorway has been bricked up when the house was turned into apartments. As the story progresses, it appears this door acts as a portal to a world created by a cruel creature. She has been luring children to her and draining them dry for the entire time the house has existed.

A Rusty Key

The key that opens the door in the Jones' drawing room is described as being old and rusty. Coraline notices when she holds it for the first time this key also seems to be colder than the other keys.

Tea Leaves

Miss Spink and Miss Forcible read Coraline's fortune as it is spelled out by the way her tea leaves fall in her cup. They believe these leaves indicate that Coraline is in danger.

A Stone with a Hole in It

Miss Spink gives this stone to Coraline after the two old ladies read her tea leaves and realize she is in danger. The stone seems not only to keep Coraline safe, but she is also able to locate the souls of three children when she looks through it.

A Full Length Mirror

Coraline's other mother shows her this mirror behind which she can see her real mother and father asking for help. At another point in the novel, Coraline notices that her other mother walks up behind her but is not reflected in the mirror. It is also behind this mirror that the other mother imprisons Coraline for being rude to her.

A Snow Globe with Two People in It

Coraline finds this snow globe on the mantle in the drawing room of the flat in the other mother's world. In her own world, the mantle is empty. When she realizes that the other mother cannot create anything by herself but can only twist and transform what has



already been created, she wonders from where the snow globe came. She uses her reasoning to deduce that the two people in the globe are her parents.

Blackbeetles

Coraline's other mother offers her a treat from a white paper sack that Coraline believes will be some type of candy. The treat, however, turns out to be blackbeetles, a bug that her other mother eats greedily.

Tiny Silver Key

The other mother uses this silver key to unlock the mirror, revealing a small room into which she imprisons Coraline.

Gray Glass Marbles

The souls of the three children Coraline became acquainted with while she was in the small room behind the mirror are located in what appears to be gray colored glass marbles.

A Small, Brass Front Door Key

The other mother gives Coraline this key to the front ground floor apartment under the guise of doing her a favor. It is while she is in this apartment that the creature that was her other father tries to attack her.

The Other Mother's Right Hand

The other mother swears on her right hand that she will let Coraline go if she is able to locate the souls of the three children and her parents. After Coraline escapes, the other mother's right hand travels from the other world to the real world, looking for the key to the door between worlds.

Clump of Tea Leaves

A clump of tea leaves that looks like a hand appears in Coraline's tea cup when she has tea with Miss Spink and Miss Forcible after she has rescued her parents but before she traps her other mother's hand in the well.



Protective Coloration

Protective coloration is a term that Coraline learns when she watches a nature show about how some animals protect themselves from predators. Coraline uses this idea when she gets an old tablecloth from her mother to use to trap the other mother's hand in the well.



Settings

The Jones' Family Flat

The Jones' family flat is one of several flats in a huge, old house that has been divided up. The Jones family lives in the second floor flat above Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, and below the one inhabited by Mr. Bobo. In the flat's drawing room, there is a door that is kept locked. This door has been blocked up and leads nowhere.

The Other Jones' Family Flat

When Coraline goes through the strange door in the drawing room of her new apartment, she enters an apartment that looks just like her own. As she looks more closely, she notices differences like the expression on the face of the boy in a painting in the hallway. It is in this apartment that the other mother tries to convince Coraline to live with her. It is in the toy box in her room in the other apartment that Coraline locates the soul of the first child.

The Closet Behind the Mirror

When Coraline is rude to her other mother, she is locked into a small closet behind the hallway mirror as a punishment. During her time in this closet Coraline meets what is left of three other children who have been tricked into staying with the other mother. She agrees to find the souls of these children so they can be at peace.

An Abandoned Theater

When Coraline first visits Miss Spink and Miss Forcible's apartment in the other world, the flat is a working theater. When she goes back to it after she makes her proposal to the other mother to let her go, the theater is abandoned and derelict. It is in a cocoon made of Miss Spink and Miss Forcible in this theater that Coraline finds the soul of the second child.

The Cellar

Coraline finds the bloated mass that is her other father in the cellar of the front apartment. Even though she has disposed of him, the other mother has enough control of the other father that she is able to manipulate him into trying to hurt Coraline. Coraline outsmarts the creature by pulling off the one remaining button eye it has left and then locking it in the cellar before it can find her.



The Attic

It is in the attic apartment located in the other mother's world that Coraline finds the soul of the third child. She comes in contact with the other Crazy Old Man who tries to encourage her to stay in that world by telling her she'll be able to have whatever she wants whenever she wants it. Coraline disputes the man, saying she knows she wouldn't be happy in that type of life.

The Old Well

When Coraline first comes to live in the house, Miss Spink and Miss Forcible warn her about the old well on the grounds. Being an explorer, Coraline decides to go in search of the well so that she can be sure and avoid it. Later in the book when she realizes the other mother's hand has come back in search of the key to the door, Coraline sets up a trap at this old well that sends both the other mother's hand and the key into the deep well.



Themes and Motifs

Bravery

Bravery is a major theme in this novel. Coraline tells the cat her father's definition of bravery as they are crossing into the other mother's world to rescue her parents. She says that bravery is not the absence of fear, but doing what one knows needs to be done despite his fear. Although Coraline fears what might happen to her in the other mother's world, she knows that she has to get her parents back. She knows they would do the same for her. Note also that bravery is not something that is acquired for good after just one try, but often must be sought over and over again to get one through a scary situation. There are several times that Coraline must dig deep into herself to find the bravery she needs to get through the other mother's world. Bravery also doesn't come to all. When Coraline exults the creature that was the other father to be brave and refuse to do what the other mother wants her to do, he is not able to pull together even that much bravery. Finally, after Coraline does face the other mother, she finds that she is less afraid of routine things, like going back to school, that used to scare her in the past.

Love

Love and the different types of love is one of the major themes in the novel. The major issue in the novel is the comparison between the way that Coraline's parents show their love for her and the way that the other mother shows her love for Coraline. Although Coraline's parents obviously love her and take care of her, they also tend to neglect her a little bit. They are often busy with work and don't stop to play with her or entertain her. Instead, they encourage her to entertain herself or visit with the neighbors to pass the time. When Coraline's mother takes the girl shopping, she buys practical clothes instead of the Day-glo green gloves that Coraline wants. For a child, this refusal to buy a novelty can be seen as a lack of love when in reality, it's just a matter of practicality.

With the other mother, Coraline comes to realize that this creature loves her only as one might love a possession. As the other mother gets more and more frustrated with Coraline when she will not bow to her wishes, Coraline sees how the other mother's love wanes. Based on her experience with the other father, Coraline has seen how the other mother treats those things that frustrate her or cause her unhappiness. Coraline knows that the other mother's love for her will fade, just as the other mother's love has faded for the other children she has captured in the past.

Happiness

Happiness is another aspect of life that Coraline learns about during her experience with the other mother. One of the arguments in favor of Coraline staying with the other mother presented by the other crazy old man is that she will be happy if she stays in the



other world. He argues that in the real world, people will continue to pronounce her name wrong, a mistake Coraline hates and that her parents will continue to ignore her. The old man insists that the other mother will give Coraline whatever she wants. While most children would believe that getting what one wants when he wants it would be the best thing ever, Coraline is smart enough to realize that these things will not bring her happiness. She knows that without working for and earning the things she wants, they will be worth nothing to her.

Names

The idea of having a name and being called properly by that name is an underlying theme in this novel. Coraline, the cat and Mr. Bobo are all characters who have name struggles in one way or another during the course of the story. Additionally, some characters are not even given names, indicating they really have no identity.

Coraline's main issue with her name is that people don't pronounce her name correctly. Although her name is Coraline, most people pronounce it like the more common Caroline. Coraline tells Miss Spink, Miss Forcible and Mr. Bobo how to correctly pronounce her name but they don't seem to hear her or take the information seriously as they continue to pronounce her name wrong. One of the reasons that the other crazy old man upstairs gives Coraline for not going back to her world is that people will continue to pronounce her name incorrectly. Since this man is using the pronunciation of her name as a bargaining chip to keep Coraline in his world, it signifies that it must be an issue for Coraline.

The cat also has a name issue. His issue, however, is that he does not believe he needs a name. The cat argues that because he knows who he is, he doesn't need a name. He accredits the human need for names to the idea they don't have a firm identity. Coraline tells the cat that without a name, she couldn't call the cat if she wanted it to come to her. The cat suggests that he can be called for an event, like dinner, simply by calling out "dinner" with no names needed. Even though the cat seems sure of itself in its desire not to be labeled with a name, Coraline can't seem to wrap her head around the idea the animal doesn't want a name.



Styles

Point of View

The story is told from the third person limited point of view from the view of Coraline, the heroine of the novel. Since the novel is a story of Coraline's development, it could not be told as effectively if it were told from any other point of view. If the story were told from any other character's point of view it would not have been able to illustrate Coraline's thoughts and emotions as she went through her discovery of the other mother's world and the ordeal she faced there. While a third person omniscient narrator could have told the story adequately, it would not have had the central focus on Coraline's struggle with her own fear and uncertainty.

The story is told through a combination of both exposition and narration. The house and grounds are described so the reader can understand how significant it is that the other mother's house and grounds are so similar. Each aspect of the area that is described in any detail, such as the old, abandoned well, is done so with an intent to incorporate that aspect later in the story. The well, for instance, is important as it is in this well that Coraline traps the other mother's hand. The story covers only a span of a few weeks. These weeks begin when Coraline and her family first move into their new flat, then end the night before Coraline is to begin classes at her new school.

Language and Meaning

The language of the story is not technically stiff, but neither is it relaxed. The sentences are fairly short and straightforward. There is not a great deal of needless description or conversation. Everything contained in the novel is very pointed and intended to serve a purpose. The book seems to be focused on teaching adolescents and preteens about the meaning of bravery.

One aspect of the novel that will stand out to American readers is the use of British terms to refer to things in the novel. For instance, instead of calling their new home an apartment, it is called a flat. Miss Spink and Miss Forcible invite Coraline in for a cup of hot tea, a British custom. The British also refer to their room set aside just for company as a drawing room, even though there isn't often much drawing done in these rooms. In America this room might be called a formal living room.

Structure

This relatively short children's book is divided into thirteen chapters. The average chapter length is fifteen pages with the shortest being Chapter VII at nine pages and the longest being chapter V at 23 pages. The story follows a chronological timeline beginning with Coraline and her parents first becoming accustomed to their new flat and ending on the day before Coraline is to return to school.



The plot of the novel is very simple with only a main plot and no subplots. The simple plot is needed to ensure that the reader absorbs the lesson of bravery taught in the story. The novel moves along at a reasonable pace, neither too fast nor too slow. It keeps the reader engaged in the story. There are no flashbacks or long sections of back-story to distract the reader. It is linear in nature. On the whole, the novel is easy to read and entertaining.



Quotes

The other — the big, carved, brown wooden door at the far corner of the drawing room — was locked.

-- Narrator (I paragraph 46)

Importance: This locked door in the drawing room of Coraline and her parents' new flat turns out to be a portal to a strange, reverse universe ruled by an evil woman who claims to be Coraline's other mother.

The message is this. Don't go through the door.' He paused. 'Does that mean anything to you?

-- The crazy old man from upstairs (II paragraph 31)

Importance: The crazy old man who lives in the upstairs apartment in Coraline's house gives Coraline this message from the mice he claims he's training for a circus. Although the message warns Coraline not to go through the door in the drawing room, she does not heed the warning.

You know, Caroline,' she said, after a while, 'you are in terrible danger.

-- Miss Spink (II paragraph 65)

Importance: Miss Spink reports to Coraline that she is in danger when she reads the girl's fortune as spelled out by the tea leaves in the bottom of her cup.

It opened on to a dark hallway. The bricks had gone as if they'd never been there. There was a cold, musty smell coming through the open doorway: it smelled like something very old and very slow.

-- Narrator (III paragraph 34)

Importance: While Coraline's parents are away from home, she takes the opportunity to examine the locked door in the drawing room. This time when she unlocks the door, it is no longer bricked up but instead opens to another hallway.

They went into the kitchen. On a china plate on the kitchen table was a spool of black cotton, and a long silver needle, and, beside them, two large black buttons.

-- Narrator (IV paragraph 113)

Importance: Coraline's other parents tell her that she must do only one thing if she wants to stay in their world forever. When they take her into the kitchen, Coraline sees the thread, needle and buttons lying out. It is suspected her other parents intend to sew these button eyes, like the ones they have, onto her if she plans to stay.

Kidnapping. Grown-up-napping really. My parents have been stolen away into a world on the other side of the mirror in our hall.

-- Coraline (V paragraph 47)



Importance: Coraline calls the police when she first realizes that her parents have been kidnapped by her other mother. The officer who talks to her does not take her claims seriously.

And he said that wasn't brave of him, doing that, just standing there and being stung,' said Coraline to the cat. 'It wasn't brave because he wasn't scared: it was the only thing he could do. But going back again to get his glasses, when he knew the wasps were there, when he was really scared. That was brave.

-- Coraline (V paragraph 75)

Importance: Coraline gives this definition of bravery to the cat as they are entering the other mother's world to try to find Coraline's parents.

She put the stone into the pocket of her jeans, and it was as if her head had cleared a little. As if she had come out of some sort of a fog.

-- Narrator (VI paragraph 8)

Importance: Miss Spink gives Coraline a stone with a hole in that the lady claims will help to keep Coraline safe. The stone not only keeps Coraline safe, but additionally clears her head and helps her to locate the souls of the three children that she meets in the closet behind the hallway mirror.

No point,' said the other father. 'There isn't anywhere but here. This is all she made: the house, the grounds, and the people in the house. She made it and she waited.

-- Coraline's Other Father (VI paragraph 22)

Importance: When Coraline tells her other father that she will go out and explore if he will not talk to her, he tells her there is nothing more to explore.

She left us here,' said one of the voices. 'She stole our hearts, and she stole our souls, and she took our lives away, and she left us here, and she forgot about us in the dark.

-- One of the children behind the mirror (VII paragraph 22)

Importance: While Coraline is locked behind the mirror, she meets what is left of three other children who have been lured to stay in the other mother's world. Instead of the happy life she promised, the other mother has taken everything from the children including their hearts, souls and lives.

Look through the stone,' it said to her.

-- One of the children behind the mirror (VII paragraph 52)

Importance: It is this suggestion from one of the children trapped behind the hallway mirror that gives Coraline the most help in finding the children's souls.

Then you let me go. You let everyone go — my real father and mother, the dead children, everyone you've trapped here.



-- Coraline (VIII paragraph 20)

Importance: Coraline makes a deal with the other mother if she is able to find the souls of the three children behind the mirror as well as her parents, the other mother will let her, the children and her parents go free.

It was true: the other mother loved her. But she loved Coraline as a miser loves money, or a dragon loves its gold. In the other mother's button eyes, Coraline knew that she was a possession, nothing more. A tolerated pet, whose behavior was no longer amusing.

-- Coraline (IX paragraph 8)

Importance: The other mother repeatedly tells Coraline that she loves her. Coraline knows this is true, but also knows that the other mother sees and loves her only as a possession, not as a person.

She does not mean you well,' whispered a ghost voice in her ear. 'We do not believe that she would help you. It must be a trick.

-- One of the Children (IX paragraph 20)

Importance: When the other mother offers Coraline the key to the front, ground floor apartment, the children try to warn Coraline that the other mother is trying to trick her.

Nothing's changed, little girl,' he said, his voice sounding like the noise dry leaves make as they rustle across a pavement. 'And what if you do everything you swore you would? What then? Nothing's changed. You'll go home. You'll be bored. You'll be ignored. No one will listen to you, not really listen to you. You're too clever and too quiet for them to understand. They don't even get your name right.

-- The Other Crazy Old Man (X paragraph 14)

Importance: While Coraline is in the apartment belonging to the other crazy old man, he tries to convince her that she would be better off staying in the other mother's world. Although he points out all of the negative that happens to her in her world, Coraline is too smart to accept his reasoning.

I don't want whatever I want. Nobody does. Not really. What kind of fun would it be if I just got everything I ever wanted? Just like that, and it didn't mean anything. What then?

-- Coraline (X paragraph 22)

Importance: Although she is young, Coraline realizes that even if one got what one wanted all the time, that person would still not be happy because all the things he had would not mean anything.

But I got you three back,' said Coraline. 'I got Mum and Dad back. I shut the door. I locked it. What more was I meant to do?

-- Coraline (XII paragraph 39)



Importance: In a dream in which she has a picnic with the three children that she saved from the other mother, Coraline begins to realize that although she rescued her parents, as well as the other three children, she has still not done everything that needs to be done to keep others from being harmed by the other mother.

She blinked through her thick spectacles. 'Oh dear. No, I have no idea what that signifies. It looks almost like a hand.

-- Miss Spink (XIII paragraph 14)

Importance: When Miss Spink looks at the tea leaves in the bottom of Coraline's cup after Coraline has freed her parents, she sees a clump of leaves for which she does not understand the meaning. Coraline, however, knows this hand-shaped clump means she must take care of the other mother's right hand, which is now terrorizing her world.

And then the weight and the momentum of the hand sent the plastic dolls' cups flying, and the paper tablecloth, the key, and the other mother's right hand went tumbling down into the darkness of the well.

-- Narrator (XIII paragraph 69)

Importance: Coraline uses a tablecloth and a child's game to outsmart the other mother. She arranges for the key to the door in the drawing room, along with the other mother's hand to fall into an abandoned well.

The mice tell me that all is good,' he said. 'They say that you are our savior, Caroline.

-- Mister Bobo (XIII paragraph 79)

Importance: In the final chapter of the book, the mice send a second message to Coraline, saying that she has saved their world from the other mother.