

Fantastic Mr. Fox Study Guide

Fantastic Mr. Fox by Roald Dahl

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Plot Summary

“Fantastic Mr. Fox” is a children's novel written by Roald Dahl and illustrated by Quentin Blake in which the fantastic Mr. Fox attempts to outwit three mean farmers in their attempts to kill him and his family. When the novel begins, Mr. Fox, Mrs. Fox, and their four Small Foxes live in a hole under a tree on a hill overlooking the valley. In the valley are three large farms owned and overseen by three farmers, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. They are very rich, and are very mean. Each night, Mr. Fox sneaks down to their farms to steal chickens, ducks, geese, bacon, or whatever else he can in order to feed his family. Each night, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean try to kill Mr. Fox, but are outwitted.

Finally, Bean hatches a plan where he, Boggis, and Bunce will stake out Mr. Fox's hole, and shoot him when he emerges. Mr. Fox is not expecting this trap, and has his tail shot off while scurrying back into his hole. The three farmers decide they will not wait for Mr. Fox to emerge, so they grab shovels and begin to dig out Mr. Fox's home. Mrs. Fox and the Small Foxes are terrified, but Mr. Fox reminds them that foxes can dig faster than people. The entire Fox family begins to dig new tunnels to get away from the farmers.

Furious and exhausted, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean decide the only way to get Mr. Fox is to dig out the entire hill. Using two mechanical shovels attached to their farm tractors, they begin to tear up the hill. Mr. Fox and his family continue to dig deeper. Still unable to get to Mr. Fox, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean decide to wait him out with shotguns in hand. Days pass. Mrs. Fox grows weak from worry and hunger. Mr. Fox knows the situation is desperate, so begins digging once again with his children.

The Fox family runs into Mr. Badger and his son, who are horrified with what the farmers have done to the hill. Mr. Badger reveals that all the diggers –including the Rabbits, the Weasels, the and the Moles have all been forced underground. Mr. Badger blames the entire situation on Mr. Fox, who accepts the blame and says he has a plan to save everyone. Along with Mr. Badger, Mr. Fox digs his way into one of Boggis's chicken house, where several chickens are stolen. Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger next dig to Bunce's storehouse, where prepared ducks, geese, ham, bacon, and vegetables are being kept to be sold at market. Mr. Fox oversees the taking of just enough food to feed everyone, but not enough to be noticed missing. Mr. Fox then does the same with Mr. Bean's secret cider cellar, where apple cider is taken to round out a meal.

Mr. Badger questions the moral nature of their stealing, but Mr. Fox says they are only stealing to feed their children and stay alive. Mr. Fox explains that stealing food pales in comparison to trying to kill someone. Mr. Badger accepts this reasoning. He and Mr. Fox then return to the tunnels, where a giant dining hall has been dug out and the families of all the diggers are assembled. A tremendous feast is had, where everyone cheers Mr. Fox as fantastic. Meanwhile, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean remain waiting at the entrance to the tunnel above, totally unaware of what is going on.



Chapters 1 – 4

Summary

In Chapter 1, The Three Farmers, the three men who farm down in the valley have become rich, and very mean. Farmer Boggis is a very fat chicken farmer who keeps thousands of chickens. Farmer Bunce is a very short, pot-bellied duck and goose farmer, who keeps thousands of ducks and geese. His favorite food is doughnuts-and-goose-liver-paste. Farmer Bean is tall, thin, and clever, and keeps thousands of turkeys and apple trees. Bean turns his apples into cider, which is all he ever drinks. The local children make up rhymes about how mean the farmers are.

In Chapter 2, Mr. Fox, Mr. Fox and Mrs. Fox live in a hole under a tree in a wood on top of a hill overlooking the valley. They have four Small Fox children. Each night, Mr. Fox travels to one of the three farms below to steal food. He always avoids Boggis, Bunce, and Bean by staying downwind and smelling them as he approaches, allowing Mr. Fox to escape capture by taking a different path. Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are always very angry about never being able to stop Mr. Fox. Bean meets with Boggis and Bunce to tell them that they must surprise Mr. Fox. All three farmers will hide outside of Mr. Fox's house hole, then shoot him when he emerges.

In Chapter 3, The Shooting, Mrs. Fox asks Mr. Fox to bring home two ducks for dinner, but warns Mr. Fox to be careful. Mr. Fox is cocky and says he always has a handle on the situation. He does not know, however, that Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are waiting nearby with guns ready. Mr. Fox emerges from his hole carefully as he always does. Just as he catches a glint of moonlight, he realizes he is looking at a gun. He dives back into the hole as Boggis, Bunce, and Bean open fire. They shoot off part of Mr. Fox's tail, but miss the rest of him. The three men refuse to wait around for Mr. Fox to come back out, so Mr. Bean suggests digging Mr. Fox out.

In Chapter 4, The Terrible Shovels, Mrs. Fox tends to Mr. Fox's bloody tail stump. Mr. Fox is very sad, as his tail will not grow back. That night, Mr. and Mrs. Fox realize they must move since their hole has been discovered. But the sudden scraping of shovels catches their attention, as Bean, Boggis, and Bunce begin digging into the house. Mrs. Fox and the children are terrified. Mr. Fox and his family then begin digging a tunnel deeper and deeper to get away from the farmers, knowing foxes can dig faster than people. Safely away, Mrs. Fox tells their children that their father, Mr. Fox, is fantastic.

Analysis

When Roald Dahl's novel "Fantastic Mr. Fox" begins, a long-established pattern has emerged. Each night, Mr. Fox sneaks down to one of the three farms belonging to Bunce, Boggis, and Bean. There, he steals food to bring home to his family. Meanwhile, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean do their best to capture Mr. Fox each night, but are never



successful. They decide that, rather than waiting for Mr. Fox to come to them, they will go to him. Mr. Fox is nearly killed the first night that Boggis, Bunce, and Bean stake out his home; he loses his tail in the process.

Mr. Fox is determined to succeed against the three farmers not as a matter of pride, but as a matter of taking care of his family. Road Dahl argues here, and through the course of the novel, that family is the most important thing in someone's life. This is very true of Mr. Fox, who steals each night in order to feed his family. Mr. Fox does not only steal to feed his family, but he risks his life to feed them. Indeed, that first night the three farmers wait outside his hole he very nearly loses his life.

Things look very grim for Mr. Fox when Boggis, Bunce, and Bean begin to dig away at the hole. Mr. Fox and his family believe it is only a matter of time until they are all caught and killed – but then Mr. Fox has an idea. He reveals that foxes can dig faster than people, so he and his family set to digging new tunnels. Mr. Fox tells his family not to give up, to keep digging – and through this, Dahl presents an important moral lesson for young readers. They must never give up, even when times get tough. The situation looks very bad for the Foxes, but they are not giving up.

Another important theme Dahl presents in this section of the novel is having to own up to one's responsibilities. Mr. Fox has a responsibility to provide for, and to protect his family. He must also own up to the choices that he makes. Stealing from the three farmers, no matter what the reason, and no matter how mean and rich the farmers are, still means there will be some kind of consequence. The consequence the Foxes are now faced with is having their home destroyed and their lives put at risk.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mr. Fox not suspect Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are waiting outside his hole with shotguns? What happens as a result?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mr. Fox steal? Do you believe the three farmers are right to be angry about being stolen from?

Discussion Question 3

How do Boggis, Bunce, and Bean try to deal with Mr. Fox at first? Why don't their plans work?

Vocabulary

clever, lousy, rage, blighter, cocky, glum, fantastic



Chapters 5 – 8

Summary

In Chapter 5, *The Terrible Tractors*, morning comes. Boggis, Bunce, and Bean have dug a tremendous hole, but still have not been able to reach Mr. Fox and his family. Bean decides that mechanical shovels will do the trick. While Boggis guards the hole, Bunce and Bean get on their caterpillar tractors with mechanical shovel attachments to begin digging much faster. Mr. Fox declares his family must also keep digging, but this time they must truly dig for their lives.

In Chapter 6, *The Race*, Mr. Fox and his family dig as fast as they can to outrun the two massive mechanical shovels. Just as it looks as if Mr. Fox and his family might make it, the shovels come roaring back. The farmers are so desperate to get to Fox, they dig away the entire hill which becomes a giant pit in the ground. People begin gathering from all around to laugh at the three farmers, which only makes them more determined to get Mr. Fox.

In Chapter 7, “*We’ll Never Let Him Go*,” the evening comes on and Boggis, Bunce, and Bean decide to break. They all agree they can never let Mr. Fox get away. Bean shouts into Fox’s tunnel that it is not over yet, and that Fox will soon be as dead a dingbat. The three farmers decide they will stop digging, and will starve Mr. Fox out.

In Chapter 8, *The Foxes Begin to Starve*, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean set up tents around the hole and eat their dinner. They use the smell of the food to taunt Mr. Fox. Mr. Fox’s children are very hungry, but Mr. Fox knows they cannot go up for food. Overnight, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean have all of their farmhands surround what remains of the hill to ensure Mr. Fox and his family do not dig out.

Analysis

Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are determined to kill Mr. Fox and his family. Having been so far outsmarted by Mr. Fox, the three farmers decide to use mechanical shovels attached to farm tractors to dig out the hole. In the process, they end up digging out not just Mr. Fox’s hole, but the entire hillside. Mr. Fox and his family continue to dig, with Mr. Fox telling them they must dig for their lives. Here again, Dahl expresses the importance of not giving up no matter how difficult or dangerous the situation might be. Courage and effort is needed to get through.

Mr. Fox continues to be so courageous, and so encouraging to his family because to him, there is nothing more important in the world. This again underscores Dahl’s point that there is nothing more important than family. Mr. Fox will do whatever it takes to feed, provide for, and to protect his family. At the moment, that involves motivating them to dig so that Boggis, Bunce, and Bean will not catch them and kill them.



Dahl also begins to demonstrate another important theme that readers will find through the rest of his novel. It is important to always work together, and it is better to work together than to work alone. In this situation, only the entire Fox family working together manages to keep ahead of even the mechanical shovels. The family's teamwork pays off, for as the evening comes on, the three farmers decide they will call it a night.

At the same time, Dahl reminds readers once more that they must be prepared to deal with the consequences of their actions, no matter what those actions might be. Despite the reasons Mr. Fox has stolen from the three farmers in the past, the three farmers are still angry about the thefts. Now, they will do whatever it takes to catch Mr. Fox – including digging up an entire hill to get to him.

Discussion Question 1

How do Boggis, Bunce, and Bean try to get to Mr. Fox in this section (Chapters 5-8) of the novel? Why are they unsuccessful?

Discussion Question 2

How do Mr. Fox and his family keep ahead of the three farmers and their shovels? What makes this possible?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mr. Fox protect and encourage his family to work together? Why do they refuse to give up trying to escape from the farmers?

Vocabulary

machinery, enormous, brutal, jeered, obstinate, solemn



Chapters 9 – 12

Summary

In Chapter 9, Mr. Fox Has a Plan, Boggis, Bean, and Bunce keep a watch over Mr. Fox's tunnel for three days and three nights. Mr. Fox thinks carefully, and comes up with a plan. He explains it will require more digging. While the four children are up for more digging, Mrs. Fox is unable to help. Mr. Fox tells her this is no problem at all.

In Chapter 10, Boggis's Chicken House Number One, Mr. Fox and his children dig in a very special direction, though Mr. Fox will not tell his children where they are digging, yet. They continue to dig until they reach a wooden floor. Mr. Fox then goes up for a peek, where he realizes his plan has worked. They are in Chicken House Number One on Boggis's farm. There, water is had from the drinking trough, and three chickens are killed. Mr. Fox has one of this children bring the chickens right away, while he and his other three children remain to make some arrangements.

In Chapter 11, A Surprise for Mrs. Fox, the three chickens are brought back to Mrs. Fox. Mrs. Fox is thrilled, and calls Mr. Fox "fantastic" once more. Mrs. Fox begins preparations for a fantastic feast. Meanwhile, Mr. Fox tells his other three children they will have to dig another little tunnel.

In Chapter 12, Badger, Mr. Fox and his Small Foxes continue to dig, thrilled at the idea of a coming feast. As they dig, they run into Mr. Badger and his son, who reveal that all the diggers, including Mole, Rabbit, Weasel, and their families have all been trapped underground by the crazed farmers. Mr. Badger worries that they are all finished, and blames it all on Mr. Fox. Mr. Fox accepts the blame, but then reveals he has chickens to share with everyone. He also reveals the source of the chickens as Chicken House Number One, and tells everyone to spread the invitation and the good news. Mr. Badger then commits to helping Mr. Fox dig.

Analysis

The situation is becoming serious for Mr. Fox. Mrs. Fox and the Small Foxes are growing weak, but Mrs. Fox especially has suffered from the chaos of the past few days. Mr. Fox, who values his family above all else, refuses to give up. Here, Dahl again returns to one of his important themes of family being more important than anything else – even one's own exhaustion and hunger. Mr. Fox values nothing else in the world like his family, and so Mr. Fox keeps digging.

It is in order to protect his family that Mr. Fox refuses to give up. Again, the reader is returned to the author's thematic argument that one should never give up. When Mr. Fox encounters Mr. Badger, Mr. Badger is beside himself with worry. He believes the end is coming, and that there is no way out. Mr. Fox encourages Mr. Badger not to give up by stating that he has a plan.



Mr. Badger, however thrilled he may be at a plan, is quick to point out that all of the diggers – the Badgers, the Moles, the Rabbits, and even the Weasels – are suffering because of the farmers. And the farmers, Mr. Badger says, are only doing what they are doing because Mr. Fox stole from them in the first place. Mr. Badger places the blame on Mr. Fox who, like a good character, accepts responsibility for what he has done. Here, Roald Dahl explains the fact that one must accept the blame for the things that one has done, and make them right.

Mr. Fox explains that regardless as to what the situation is, none of them can give up. Mr. Fox knows that many families are at stake, and as previously pointed out, family is the most important thing. Mr. Fox encourages Mr. Badger not to give up, and to join him in the plan because Mr. Fox now seeks to make things right for what he has caused to happen to the hill.

Discussion Question 1

Is Mr. Badger right to blame the bad situation on Mr. Fox? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What information does Mr. Badger give to Mr. Fox about all the diggers? What does Mr. Fox tell Mr. Badger?

Discussion Question 3

How does Mr. Fox respond when Mr. Badger blames him for everything that is happening? Why does Mr. Fox respond this way?

Vocabulary

suffering, marvelous, wearily, cautiously, churgle



Chapters 13 – 15

Summary

In Chapter 13, Bunce's Giant Storehouse, Mr. Badger begins helping Mr. Fox dig his new tunnel. There, they reach Bunce's farm, and tunnel up into his market storehouse. Duck and geese, prepped for sale at market, fill the room from floor to ceiling. Mr. Fox says they will carefully and selectively choose what to bring back, so they do not give away their secret to the farmers. They select some ducks, geese, ham, bacon, and various vegetables such as carrots for the coming feast.

In Chapter 14, Badger Has Doubts, Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger dig toward Farmer Bean's place. Mr. Badger, however, feels badly about stealing. Mr. Fox explains the stealing is to feed their starving children. He also explains that stealing pales in comparison to the farmers trying to kill them. Mr. Badger accepts this logic, and continues to help dig until they reach a brick wall.

In Chapter 15, Bean's Secret Cider Cellar, Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger enter Bean's secret cider cellar, where Mr. Rat tries to turn them away, declaring the place to be his. Mr. Fox threatens to eat Mr. Rat, which causes Mr. Rat to run away. Mr. Fox and the others drink some cider, and decide to bring more back to turn the feast into a banquet. Mr. Rat tells them all to leave or there will no cider left for him. Suddenly, a voice from upstairs calls out for Mabel to bring up some cider for Farmer Bean.

Analysis

Mr. Fox, the Small Foxes, and Mr. Badger all commit to working together to carry out Mr. Fox's plan. As Roald Dahl argues, it is better to work together than to work alone. Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger, working together with the Small Foxes, are able to dig new tunnels and reach the foodstuffs of Boggis and Bunce. The delicious foods that they now steal will ensure that all of the diggers will not starve to death. Only by working together does Mr. Fox's plan begin to succeed.

The working together of Mr. Fox, the Small Foxes, and Mr. Badger also reinforce Dahl's argument that one should never give up. Faced with death at every turn – from shotguns, giant shovels, and starvation – Mr. Fox, Mr. Badger, and the others do what they can to survive. Mr. Fox leads the way with his plan, newly hatched under desperate circumstances. This plan gives the Foxes and the other diggers access to all the food they will ever need to survive underground.

However, Mr. Badger has moral concerns about stealing food from the farmers. After all, it was stealing food that got them into trouble in the first place. Dahl argues that sometimes, moral rules must be broken for moral reasons. Mr. Fox explains in this fashion that stealing to feed one's family and to stay alive is not a bad thing. Further,



stealing some food is nothing compared to trying to kill someone. Mr. Badger accepts this line of moral reasoning, and continues to help Mr. Fox carry out his plan.

Discussion Question 1

How is Mr. Fox able to get Mr. Badger to join in helping him with his plan? How does Mr. Badger feel about it at first? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Mr. Fox says that stealing from the farmers is okay because it means survival. Do you agree or disagree with this reasoning? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Do you agree or disagree with the idea that sometimes a moral rule must be broken for a moral reason? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

blindfold, luscious, choicest, frump, shrieked



Chapters 16 – 18

Summary

In Chapter 16, *The Woman*, Mabel the housemaid comes downstairs to collect several bottles of cider for Mr. Bean while Mrs. Bean explains the stake-out cannot last much longer. When Mabel returns upstairs, Mr. Fox, Mr. Badger, and the remaining Small Fox rush off with cider bottles. Rat shouts after them, calling them thieves and robbers.

In Chapter 17, *The Great Feast*, Mr. Fox and the others rush back down the length of the tunnel, spurred on by what awaits them. A large dining room has been dug out, and is full of the families of Rabbits, Moles, Badgers, Weasels, and the Foxes. The dining table is covered with delicious foods. Everyone is thrilled to see Mr. Fox, Mr. Badger, and the last Small Fox. Hugging and cheers are had as everyone begins to eat. Mrs. Fox gives a toast to her husband, a fantastic fox. Mr. Fox declares the meal is owed in thanks to Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. He explains the tunnel system, and the unlimited supply of food, will mean they will never have to risk their lives by going out into the open again. Everyone cheers.

In Chapter 18, *Still Waiting*, it begins to rain on Boggis, Bunce, and Bean, who remain waiting by the tunnel entrance with their shotguns. They encourage one another by saying that it will only be a matter of time before Mr. Fox comes up. The narrator explains they are still waiting.

Analysis

As the novel comes to an end, Roald Dahl's argument that one should never give up no matter what is held up to be true. Mr. Fox wins against the farmers by not giving up, and digging a network of tunnels to their three farms. This means that there will be enough food and water to live underground forever. Mr. Badger and the other diggers are all thrilled with this idea, for no longer will their lives be in danger when they go above ground. Because Mr. Fox chose not to give up, he has succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. The feast in the dining hall symbolizes that success.

Mr. Fox's inspiration is again seen at the end of the novel. Everything he has done, he has done for his family. To Mr. Fox, there is nothing more important than family. He also recognizes how important family is to others, such as Mr. Badger. Mr. Badger joined in the plan to help save everyone because of how much his family meant to him. Only by working together have they achieved success – and, as Dahl argues, it is better to work together than to work alone.

At the end of the day, by saving everyone, Mr. Fox has made up for causing a problem in the first place. Having accepted the blame for the farmers destroying the hill, Mr. Fox has done everything he could to make things right. As Dahl points out, one must always accept the blame for the things that one does wrong, and must always seek to make



them right. Even when it appears as if things cannot be made right, one can never give up. Mr. Fox chose not to give up, and for this, he is fantastic.

Discussion Question 1

Why does it seem that Boggis, Bunce, and Bean do not realize that Fox has outwitted them? How does Mr. Fox manage to keep his plan a secret from the three farmers?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mr. Fox's tunnel system and the endless supply of food mean for the diggers? How do they feel about this? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Do you believe it is fair to call Mr. Fox "fantastic"? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

ravenous, succulent, colossal, brute, famished



Characters

Mr. Fox

Mr. Fox, called fantastic by his wife, Mrs. Fox, for his dedication to family and his cleverness, is the hero of the story. Mr. Fox steals food from the three valley farms in order to feed himself and his family. This draws the anger of the farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean, who make it their goal to kill Mr. Fox. Mr. Fox is overconfident, and is very narrowly killed in an ambush where he loses his tail. Mr. Fox, seeking to protect his family, helps them to avoid being captured and killed by the three farmers by burrowing further into the ground. When Mr. Badger blames everything that has happened to the hill on Mr. Fox, who humbly accepts the blame but comes up with a plan to ensure the survival of all the hill diggers. He leads the way in developing tunnels that take the diggers to each of the farms, where they can steal food and water to survive on. Mr. Fox is very happy when his plan succeeds, and he is cheered by all diggers as being fantastic.

Mr. Boggis

Mr. Boggis is one of three farmers in the valley. Rich and mean, Mr. Boggis farms thousands chickens and is immensely fat from eating many of them. Indeed, each meal Boggis eats consists of three boiled chickens smothered in dumplings and gravy. Boggis is very angered when he learns that Mr. Fox has been stealing chickens, and so he works with Bunce and Bean to capture Mr. Fox.

Mr. Bunce

Mr. Bunce is one of three farmers in the valley. Rich and mean, Mr. Bunce is potbellied and very, very short, and farms ducks, geese, pigs, and other animals. He always has horrible stomach aches from his favorite food, doughnuts with goose liver paste. Bunce, like Boggis and Bean, is furious with Mr. Fox for stealing from his storehouses. Bunce teams up with Boggis and Bean to attempt to kill Mr. Fox.

Mr. Bean

Mr. Bean is one of three farmers in the valley. Rich, mean, and married to Mrs. Bean, Mr. Bean is very thin from a diet consisting only of alcoholic apple cider. Mr. Bean farms turkeys and apples. Mr. Bean rarely ever bathes, is horribly dirty, but is very intelligent. It is Mr. Bean who suggests to Boggis and Bunce that they go after Mr. Fox, rather than waiting for Mr. Fox to come to them.



Mrs. Fox

Mrs. Fox is the wife of Mr. Fox. A homemaker dedicated to her family, Mrs. Fox is very intelligent and very compassionate. She worries about Mr. Fox's work in stealing from the farms down in the valley. When the farmers dig up the hill, Mrs. Fox is quickly exhausted from digging so much to escape, from having no food to eat, and from worrying for her family. Mrs. Fox later helps to prepare the grand feast when Mr. Fox's new plan succeeds.

Small Foxes

The four Small Foxes are the children of Mr. Fox and Mrs. Fox. The Small Foxes are kind and gentle children who admire their parents greatly. Working as a team, they ensure their family's survival when the farmers attempt to dig them out. They later help Mr. Fox steal food from the three farms while underground, and to deliver the food back to their mother to prepare a grand feast.

Mr. Badger

Mr. Badger is one of the many digger residents of the hill. Mr. Badger is angry with Mr. Fox for bringing on the wrath of the farmers, and destroying their home. Mr. Badger is quick to forgive, however, especially when he learns that Mr. Fox has a plan for survival. Mr. Badger questions the moral nature of stealing food from the farmers, but comes to accept the theft as necessary for their survival.

Mrs. Bean

Mrs. Bean is the wife of Mr. Bean. During the novel, Mrs. Bean is not seen, but is heard shouting down to Mabel in the secret cider cellar. Mrs. Bean is primarily concerned with making sure her husband has enough cider to drink during the stake-out of Mr. Fox's tunnel. Mrs. Bean has no patience with Mabel, and demands Mabel move quickly.

Mr. Rat

Mr. Rat is one of the local animals in the valley who the others would rather not deal with if they do not have to. Mr. Rat is rude, combative, and always drunk. Mr. Rat spends most of his time in Mr. Bean's secret cider cellar, where he drinks all day long. Mr. Rat tries to stop Mr. Fox from running off with some of the cider, but is unsuccessful in doing so. In response, Mr. Rat shouts unkind words at Mr. Fox as Mr. Fox heads back.



Mabel

Mabel is the housekeeper at the Bean farmhouse. Mabel is a large, fat woman who is responsible for ensuring Mr. Bean always has enough cider. Mabel is sent into the secret cider cellar to gather jugs of cider for Mr. Bean to drink during the Fox stakeout. There, she nearly discovers Mr. Fox and the others while they are preparing to steal cider, but fortunately does not see them.



Symbols and Symbolism

Chicken

Chicken symbolize hope and victory in the novel. Chickens are raised and eaten by Boggis, and stolen by Mr. Fox. Boggis raises thousands of chickens in several different chicken houses. When Mr. Fox's home is destroyed and he must feed his family underground, he tunnels to one of the chicken houses, where he steals three chickens. These chickens become the basis for the victory feast that follows.

Geese

Geese are a symbol of survival for the Fox family. Geese are raised by Bunce, and stolen by Mr. Fox. Bunce mashes goose livers into a disgusting paste which he then eats with doughnuts. When Mr. Fox is forced underground and must find a way to feed his family and the families of the other diggers, he steals numerous geese from Bunce's farm.

Cider

Cider is a symbol of victory for the Foxs and other digging animals. Cider is distilled from apples grown by Bean on his farm. The cider is the only thing that Bean will consume, making him very thin and making him smell very bad. Mr. Rat has broken into Bean's cellar of cider, and spends his days drinking it. Mr. Fox breaks into the cellar of cider to steal only three bottles of cider for a victory feast.

Mr. Fox

Mr. Fox's tail is shot off early in the novel, and represents the dangers of being overconfident. When the three farmers decide to stake out Mr. Fox's hole, Mr. Fox – who believes he will never be outwitted by the three farmers because he is too smart for them – emerges from his hole unsuspectingly. He narrowly avoids being killed when the three farmers try to shoot him, but his tail is shot off in the process of escaping. It is a painful reminder to Mr. Fox not to underestimate his enemies.

Shotguns

Shotguns symbolize death and danger in the novel. Shotguns are carried and fired by Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. They intend to use the shotguns to kill Mr. Fox. They very nearly succeed their first time, but manage only to shoot of Mr. Fox's tail. Following this near success, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean keep their shotguns with them at all times as they attempt to dig out and kill Mr. Fox once and for all.



Shovels

Shovels symbolize danger for the Fox family. Shovels are used by Boggis, Bunce, and Bean to dig out Mr. Fox's hole. Realizing that Mr. Fox will not reemerge anytime soon, the three farmers decide to use shovels to dig down to find Mr. Fox. Mr. Fox and his family dig faster than Boggis, Bunce, and Bean can, so the farmers decide a change in strategy is needed.

Mechanical shovels

The mechanical shovels demonstrate that technology does not always trump the innovative mind. Two mechanical shovels, operated by use of farm tractors, are used by Bean and Bunce to dig in after Mr. Fox even faster than by hand. The mechanical shovels do immense work, digging up not only Mr. Fox's home, but the entire hill. The mechanical shovels end up digging a massive pit in the attempt to get to Mr. Fox, but the farmers are unsuccessful in taking down Mr. Fox.

Carrots

Carrots symbolize health and a return to normal for the diggers in the novel. Carrots are among those food items stolen by Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger from Bunce's market-ready storehouse. The carrots, in addition to other vegetables, are stolen not only as a part of a balanced diet for the other diggers, but because some diggers, like the Rabbits, are vegetarians. The Rabbits and other vegetarian animals are very thankful for the carrots and other vegetables.

Dining hall

A large dining hall is hollowed out underground for the victory celebration had by all of the digging hill animals, and symbolizes the success of their efforts against the farmers. The dining hall comes to serve as the place for dozens of starving animals to eat food and drink water and cider in celebration. The dining hall also becomes the site of toasts to Mr. Fox, with Mrs. Fox calling her husband "fantastic."

Rain

Rain falls on Boggis, Bunce, and Bean at the end of the novel while they wait on Mr. Fox, and is symbolic of their foul mood and defeat. The rain soaks the three farmers as they wait, making their mood even gloomier than it already is. The rain that falls on the three farmers does not fall on the animals, who are safe underground.



Settings

The Fox home

The Fox home is located in a burrow accessible by a hole under a tree on a hill overlooking the valley. The Fox home is where Mr. Fox, Mrs. Fox, and their four Small Foxes live. The fox home is warm and cozy, and is tended to lovingly by Mrs. Fox. When Boggis, Bunce, and Bean become frustrated with being unable to catch Mr. Fox, they stake out the Fox home and try to shoot Mr. Fox when he emerges. When they are unsuccessful, they decide to dig into the Fox home. Ultimately, the Fox home is destroyed by the farmers, who bring in mechanical shovels that destroy the hill.

The tunnel

The tunnel is dug by Mr. Fox and his family as a way to escape from the farmers. The more the farmers dig, the more the Foxes must dig to get away. At last, the Foxes dig a tunnel down deep enough that they are temporarily safe from the farmers. The tunnel is widened to become a burrow for the Foxes while Mr. Fox continues to dig tunnels to steal food from the three farms. The tunnels therein become a way for the Foxes – and other animals – to survive. It is in the tunnels that Mr. Fox encounters Mr. Badger, and the two agree to work together to provide food for all the trapped animals. It is in the tunnels that Mr. Fox accepts responsibility for what has happened to the hill, finds a way to make things right.

Chicken House Number One

Chicken House Number One is located on the Boggis farm. It is accessed by Mr. Fox through tunneling underneath, and coming through the wooden floorboards. The chicken house is full of hundreds upon hundreds of chickens, three of which Mr. Fox steals in order to feed his family. The arrival of Mr. Fox in Chicken House Number One is exciting for Mr. Fox, because it means that no matter what, his family will not starve.

The storehouse

The storehouse is located on Bunce's farm, and contains all manners of food – from turkey to goose to ham to vegetables – that have all been made market-ready and are only awaiting to be sold. Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger break into the storehouse by tunneling in underneath. There, they are able to select the best meats and vegetables to bring back to feed the families of all the diggers. Having access to the storehouse will help to ensure the survival of all the hill digging animals.



Secret cider cellar

The secret cider cellar is located on Bean's farm, directly beneath his farmhouse. Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger access the cellar through a crumbling brick wall, and must chase away Mr. Rat who claims the place as his own. Mr. Rat spends his days in the cellar drinking cider, and is annoyed when Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger leave with a few jugs for their feast. While the animals do not necessarily need the cider, they take it just as a way of getting back at Bean.



Themes and Motifs

Sometimes breaking moral laws is necessary

Sometimes breaking moral laws is necessary, argues Roald Dahl in “Fantastic Mr. Fox.” In the novel, Mr. Fox must steal to feed his family. Although stealing is an immoral thing, sometimes it must be done for a moral reason.

Mr. Badger asks Mr. Fox about his stealing while the two are preparing to steal food from the three farmers. Mr. Badger notes that everything that is happening – the hill being destroyed and the digging animals being driven underground to starve – is Mr. Fox’s fault. It was Mr. Fox’s thieving that originally brought the farmers after him.

Mr. Fox explains, however, that sometimes you must do immoral things for a moral reason. In this case, it is to feed his family to prevent them from starving to death. Mr. Fox goes on to explain that the moral crime of stealing is nothing compared to the fact that the three farmers want to kill him and all the members of his family. Mr. Badger is very much impressed with this reasoning.

Mr. Fox’s stealing does not only benefit his family, as it turns out. Mr. Fox’s stealing benefits the families of the Badgers, the Rabbits, the Moles, and the Weasels, all of whom are also starving thanks to the digging of the farmers. Had it not been for Mr. Fox stealing food, all of the other animals who had nothing to do with Mr. Fox’s feud with the farmers would have suffered death as a result.

It is better to work together than to work separately

It is better to work together than to work separately, argues Roald Dahl in “Fantastic Mr. Fox.” Working together not only helps encourage those working, but it makes sure that the work being done gets accomplished, and gets accomplished faster. In the novel, working together has life and death consequences.

Boggis, Bunce, and Bean decide to work together to kill Mr. Fox. They work together in digging out his home, and then digging out the hill. Meanwhile, Mr. Fox realizes he and his family are in danger, so he tells his family they must dig to live. Working together, all six members of the Fox family are able to dig a tunnel to temporarily escape the dangers of the farmer. Digging alone, it would have been impossible, but digging together for a common cause encourages the Fox family to succeed.

When Mrs. Fox grows faint and weak, Mr. Fox and their children continue on to save their mother’s life. Working together, they tunnel toward the three major farms in the valley so that they may steal food and water to save all of their lives. Along the way, they encounter Mr. Badger and his son who also lend a hand in helping to tunnel. Working together, they manage to reach the three farms.



All of the food that is stolen from the three farms is sent back down the tunnel to Mrs. Fox. Word is then spread of the good news and the coming feast. The other families arrive, and all of the other wives help Mrs. Fox to prepare the feast together. Working together enables enough food to be prepared for everybody, and to ensure that no one will die of starvation.

One must accept blame for the things one does, and seek to make them right

One must accept blame for the things one does, and seek to make them right, argues Roald Dahl in “Fantastic Mr. Fox.” In the novel, Roald Dahl points out that all actions have consequences, and the consequences must be dealt with. In the novel, it is Mr. Fox who acts and must deal with the consequences.

When the novel begins, the reader is given to understand that, for a very long time, Mr. Fox has been stealing from the farms of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. This angers the three farmers, who decide they will try to stop Mr. Fox by killing him. Mr. Fox’s actions, undertaken for whatever reason, have consequences. These consequences involve Mr. Fox nearly being killed, and having his tail shot off.

Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are not through yet. They decide that they will get rid of Mr. Fox one way or another, so they proceed to dig away the hill in which Mr. Fox and several other families of diggers live. The three farmers dig so heavily that the hill becomes a large pit in the ground. While tunneling, Mr. Fox runs into Mr. Badger, who places blame on what has happened with Mr. Fox.

Mr. Fox accepts the blame for what has happened, stating it is indeed his fault. To make up for it, however, Mr. Fox has a plan. Leading the way, he tunnels to the three farms in the valley, where food is stolen to be given to the other starving animals. This ensures that no one will starve to death, and redeems Mr. Fox for bringing so much trouble on so many other animals. Indeed, all of the animals end up cheering for Mr. Fox by the end of the novel.

Family is the most important thing there is

Family is the most important thing there is, argues Roald Dahl in “Fantastic Mr. Fox.” Everything one does should bear in mind the responsibility of protecting and providing for family, it is demonstrated. For Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger, family is the reason they do everything which they do in their lives.

When the novel begins, Mr. Fox has long stolen from the farms in the valley in order to feed his family. While it can be debated whether or not stealing is the right way to provide for his family, Mr. Fox still does what he does for his family. Family is the most important thing to Mr. Fox, and he nightly risks his own life to ensure his family has enough to eat.



When the farmers come for Mr. Fox and his family, Mr. Fox leads the way to help his family escape to safety. He encourages them to work together, encourages them to dig, and reminds them they are in a battle for their lives. Mr. Fox works hard to keep his family together, and to keep his family safe.

When trapped underground, Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger agree to work together for the sake of their families. They tunnel to each of the three farms to provide a way to steal food for their families. All of their hard work and determination is focused solely on providing for their families in a difficult time. Indeed, Mr. Fox and Mr. Badger do not only help their own families, but the families of the Moles, Rabbits, and Weasels as well.

One should never give up

Never give up, argues Roald Dahl in “Fantastic Mr. Fox.” Just because times may become difficult, and just because there appears to be no way of succeeding, does not mean one should give up. This is certainly the case for Mr. Fox and his family in the novel.

Mr. Fox and his family are targeted by Boggis, Bunce, and Bean for Mr. Fox’s stealing from their farms. The only way to deal with Mr. Fox, the three farmers believe, is to kill him and his family. The three farmers first try to shoot Mr. Fox, then to dig out his home. Mr. Fox and his family fear the worst, but Mr. Fox remembers that foxes can dig faster than people. The fox family then manages to temporarily outdig the farmers.

The farmers then bring in massive mechanical shovels which increase their speed and the amount of digging they can do. Mr. Fox and his family dig on, fearing the worst but knowing they must tunnel away for their lives. Even though things look bad again, Mr. Fox and his family do not give up. Once again, they barely manage to outdo the farmers.

However, the farmers decide that they will not need to dig anymore, but merely starve Mr. Fox out. Mr. Fox once again realizes that he and his family are in a serious situation, as they have no food to eat. A few days pass, during which time Mr. Fox decides the only way to survive is to dig tunnels to the farms to steal food out from underneath of the feet of the farmers. Even when things are at their worst, Mr. Fox refuses to give up. Indeed, he ends up succeeding beyond his wildest dreams.

Styles

Point of View

Roald Dahl tells his novel “Fantastic Mr. Fox” in the third-person omniscient perspective. The third-person allows Dahl to tell not only the story of Mr. Fox, but the story of Boggis, Bunce, and Bean in their efforts to try to catch and kill Mr. Fox. Here, the narrator takes on an omniscient perspective, as the narrator and the reader are able to know both what Mr. Fox is up to, and what the farmers are up to. While the reader knows everything going on, Mr. Fox and the farmers do not. This gives the reader not only a privileged view of events, but also adds a sense of desperation and drama as the farmers close in on Mr. Fox. For example, early in the novel, the reader is made aware by the narrator that the three farmers are lying in wait for Mr. Fox to emerge from his hole to shoot him. Mr. Fox emerges from his hole not suspecting anything unusual, but then is shot at repeatedly. Mr. Fox narrowly escapes, though his tail is shot off.

Language and Meaning

Roald Dahl tells his novel “Fantastic Mr. Fox” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two important reasons. First, “Fantastic Mr. Fox” is a children’s novel and so must use language easy to understand by younger readers. The novel is geared toward younger audiences, and so must be easily accessible to them through the way it is written. Second, the simple and straightforward language allows Roald Dahl to get his messages across to young readers very easily, and very clearly. For example, Dahl argues that, sometimes, moral rules must be broken for a moral purpose. When Mr. Badger questions all the stealing Mr. Fox has done, Mr. Fox says very straightforwardly that it has been to save his family from starving.

Structure

Roald Dahl divides his novel “Fantastic Mr. Fox” into 18 linear, chronological, numbered, and titled chapters ranging from 1 to 18 dotted throughout with black-and-white pen-and-ink-and-watercolor-wash illustrations by Quentin Blake. Each chapters deals with a specific set of circumstances or events relating to the overall plot of the novel, and each chapter’s title directly references those events. For example, Chapter 14, Badger Has Doubts, relates Mr. Badger’s moral concerns about stealing from the farmers. Chapter 10, Boggis’s Chicken House Number One, deals with the success of Mr. Fox in reaching the Boggis farm, while Chapter 16, The Woman, deals with Mabel’s untimely entrance into the cider cellar. The illustrations found throughout the novel illustrate various aspects of the plot. For example, Chapter 13, Bunce’s Giant Storehouse, deals with Mr. Fox, Mr. Badger, and three Small Foxes arriving at Bunce’s storehouse. Illustrations include the group traveling through a tunnel and reaching the floorboards of the

storehouse, a view of the inside of the storehouse, and views of Mr. Fox and the others collecting food and sending it back through the tunnels.



Quotes

Boggis and Bunce and Bean/ One fat, one short, one lean/ These horrible crooks/ So different in looks /Were nonetheless equally mean.

-- Local children (Chapter 1)

Importance: The bad reputation of the farmers in the valley is so bad that even the local children make up rhymes about them. While the farmers may look different, and while they may have different kinds of farms, they are all very mean. Here, Dahl sets the stage for the kind of men that Mr. Fox will have to deal with in coming chapters. Their meanness will challenge Mr. Fox in ways he has never had to deal with before.

But Mr. Fox was too clever for them. He always approached a farm with the wind blowing in his face, and this mean that if any man were lurking in the shadows ahead, the wind would carry the smell of that man to Mr. Fox's nose far away.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2)

Importance: Here, the narrator describes how clever Mr. Fox is while stealing from Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. Mr. Fox makes sure he is always downwind, that way, the smell of any farmer waiting in ambush. However, the three farmers catch on, and decide that rather than waiting for Mr. Fox to come to them, they will go to Mr. Fox.

Tomorrow night we will all hide just outside the hole where the fox lives. We will wait there until he comes out. Then... Bang! Bang-bang-bang.

-- Farmer Bean (Chapter 2)

Importance: Here, Farmer Bean reveals his strategy to Farm Boggis and Farmer Bunce. Bean insists that they wait outside of Mr. Fox's house hole in order to kill him before he even makes it close to their farm. It is a clever trap, for Mr. Fox is not expected enemies so close to home. It is also clever because Mr. Fox is overconfident, and does not think the farmers could be so clever.

It'll take three days at least before he gets hungry enough to come out again. I'm not sitting around here waiting for that. Let's dig him out.

-- Farmer Bean (Chapter 3)

Importance: Farmer Bean, Farmer Boggis, and Farmer Bunce set a trap for Mr. Fox where they try to shoot him as he emerges from his hole. The farmers miss Mr. Fox, but shoot off a part of his tail. The farmers realize it will be a while before Mr. Fox comes back out, so at Mr. Bean's suggestion, they decide to dig Mr. Fox out – meaning there will be no escape for Mr. Fox or his family.

I should like you all to know that if it wasn't for your father we should all be dead by now. Your father is a fantastic fox.

-- Mrs. Fox (Chapter 4)



Importance: When Boggis, Bunce, and Bean attempt to dig out Mr. Fox and his family, Mr. Fox realizes that foxes can dig faster than people. He and his family then dig a deep, deep tunnel which keeps them safe from the farmers above. Mrs. Fox credits the survival of the family to Mr. Fox, and calls him fantastic. From this comment, the book gains its title “Fantastic Mr. Fox.”

Death to the fox!

-- Farmer Bunce (Chapter 5)

Importance: Bunce’s war cry is death for Mr. Fox as he and Bean begin using mechanical shovels to dig faster in the attempt to kill Mr. Fox. The farmers are angry at this point that they will do anything to get to Mr. Fox. This includes heavy machinery, which is used to draw ever closer to Mr. Fox and his family.

Did you hear that, Mr. Fox! It’s not over yet, Mr. Fox!”

-- Farmer Bean (Chapter 7)

Importance: Despite digging away a hill and turning it into a volcano-like crater, Bean, Boggis, and Bunce are unable to capture Mr. Fox. They are furious that they have not been able to catch Mr. Fox, so they vow to keep going. Bean taunts Mr. Fox, shouting down into his hole that it is not over yet. In other words, the farmers are not giving up, and so Mr. Fox cannot give up, either.

Boggis’s Chicken House Number One!

-- Mr. Fox (Chapter 9)

Importance: Mr. Fox’s new plan succeeds. He and his children manage to dig their way to Chicken House Number One on Boggis’s farm. There, Mr. Fox and his family enjoy water, and three chickens are killed to be brought back and eaten. This allows Mr. Fox and his family to survive, and confounds Boggis, Bunce, and Bean.

I think we’re finished!

-- Mr. Badger (Chapter 12)

Importance: As Mr. Fox and his children dig, they come across Mr. Badger. Mr. Badger explains that the crazed actions of the farmers have forced all diggers – including Mole, Rabbit, Weasel, and their families, to remain underground. They are all on the verge of starving. Mr. Badger believes they are all doomed, and blames Mr. Fox for it. Mr. Fox accepts the blame, but explains he now has chickens to share with all. Mr. Badger and the others are thrilled.

We mustn’t overdo it. Mustn’t give the game away. Mustn’t let them know what we’ve been up to.

-- Mr. Fox (Chapter 13)

Importance: When Mr. Fox, the Small Foxes, and Mr. Badger reach Bunce’s giant storehouse, they are overwhelmed by all the foods kept there to be sold at market. Mr.



Fox and the others grab what food they can, taking care to be selective so that no one discovers any food is missing. This will ensure the continued survival of all the digging animals.

It means that none of need ever go out into the open again!

-- Mr. Fox (Chapter 17)

Importance: At the feast, Mr. Fox explains the new tunnel system will give all burrowing animals access to good food and water. It means they will never have to go outside into the open again. This means their lives will be safer, and they will not want for any food or water.

They sat there by the hole, waiting for the fox to come out. And so far as I know, they are still waiting.

-- Narrator (Chapter 18)

Importance: In the end, Mr. Fox manages to outwit Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. While Mr. Fox has discovered a way to remain alive, fed, and watered underground by stealing from the cellar, chicken house, and storehouse of the three farmers, the three farmers remain waiting at the edge of Mr. Fox's tunnel. None of them realize what has gone on while they have been watching the hole instead of their own farms, and remain waiting at the hole for Mr. Fox to emerge.