

# **Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats Study Guide**

**Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats by T. S. Eliot**

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## Overview

Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats is a lively and entertaining look at the amusing antics of cats and the foibles of people. The cat owner will recognize many instances of familiar feline behavior, and the perceptive reader will see numerous parallels to human attitudes and behavior. Moreover, since these poems generally portray both the virtues and the failings of the cats being described, Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats should increase the reader's tolerance, sympathy, and awareness.

Finally, these poems serve as an excellent introduction to Eliot's poetry, preparing the reader to understand his humor, his poetic techniques, and even some of his more serious themes, which are here presented in a relatively light tone.

## About the Author

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on September 26, 1888. Although the Eliots had lived in St. Louis for two generations, the family was originally from New England, and Eliot attended the Milton School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and then Harvard University. In 1913 he began the study of philosophy in England at Merton College, Oxford. When his work at Oxford was completed, Eliot remained in England and in 1927 became a British citizen. He died in London on January 5, 1965.

Although Eliot taught briefly at Highgate School, London, and at Harvard as Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry, he was primarily a poet and man of letters. From 1922 to 1939 he edited the *Criterion*, and for a number of years he was associated with the publishing house of Fibber and Gwyer (now Faber and Faber).

A concern of much of Eliot's poetry is the problem of a culture forced to confront the loss of traditional values as the result of changes caused by theoretical and applied science. This loss of values is described in poems such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), and "The Wasteland" (1922). According to Eliot, a "dissociation of sensibility" or separation between man's intellect and his spiritual self occurred about the thirteenth century. The process by which these two can be reunited is described in "The Four Quartets" (1944). For Eliot this process included conversion to Anglo-Catholicism (1927).

One of the most influential critics of the twentieth century, Eliot used the term "objective correlative" to explain the relationship between the theme and the imagery of a poem. The objective correlative is a person or thing which functions as a concrete embodiment of the abstract idea or theme. In *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, the various cats not only display typical feline behavior, but become objective correlatives for Eliot's ideas about human personalities.

# Plot Summary

*Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* covers thirteen distinct characters and plot lines. Each character has his or her poem and is thoroughly discussed. There are also two poems dedicated to the naming and addressing of cats; these chapters do not introduce any characters, but serve as an opening and a closing to the work, thoroughly acquainting the reader with the behavior of cats. The cats range from very practical to highly impractical.

We begin with Jennyanydots, who is a typical cat. Her life is spent doing for others and she is very industrious. After Jennyanydots, however, we move to a different type of character. Although Growltiger is also a cat, he is not like Jennyanydots. He is gruff and feared, a menace to society. His reign of terror is due to end soon, as his enemies gather forces around him.

After the drama of the poem "Growltiger's Last Stand," we meet Rum Tum Tugger. He is labeled as a curious cat, a cat that is never happy. No matter what you do, you will never be able to please this cat. "The Song of the Jellicles" introduces the Jellicle Cats, who are a very rare breed. They are extremely impractical and spend their time preparing for a big event.

Mungojerrie and Rumpleteazer provide some comic relief to the book as they go about destroying everything in their path. These two cats work together to perform the most heinous deeds, and it is almost impossible to tell who is responsible.

Old Deuteronomy is a practical cat who has it good and isn't going anywhere anytime soon. He is as old as the hills, some say even older, and as he comes to town, the entire population goes into paroxysms to please him. "The Awful Battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles" is an amusing adventure that features a cat only at the last. A horrible battle is averted just in time by the arrival of the Great Rumpuscat.

Mr. Mistoffelees is a cat that can do almost anything, but he is still very practical. Whether disappearing into thin air or appearing unexpectedly, Mistoffelees is sure to surprise everyone. Macavity: The Mystery Cat is a cat that would put *The Godfather* to shame. He has many secret agents under his employ, and his exploits are fabulous. One thing is certain: this is a cat that will never be caught in the act.

Gus: The Theater Cat works at the theater door. His career as an acting cat was extensive, but nothing will ever compare to the role of his lifetime, Fireforefiddle, The Fiend of the Fell. Bustopher Jones: The Cat About Town is an amusing character. He does not hold a steady job, but has his plans all worked out. Regardless of what time it is, you can always find Bustopher getting a free meal. Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat is a cat much like Jennyanydots. He works for the railroad, taking care of the passengers. No matter what may arise, Skimbleshanks is on the job.

The book ends with Cat Morgan, who is a very likeable character. His youth was spent on illegal exploits, and his tales are exciting. However, he is now living out his days as a legitimate business cat, taking care of the door at Faber and Faber.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

This chapter is entitled the Naming of Cats. It is proposed that cats have three names, each signifying something different. Their first name is the name that humans give them and is usually quite common. This name is something simple and easy to remember, such as James or Peter. However, even fancier names such as Plato and Demeter may be given to a cat. Simple or ornate, such a name is still only the first name of a cat. The second name is a nickname of sorts, and no other cat may share it. These names are quite different from everyday names and are quite dignified. Otherwise, a cat would not be able to display such pride and, at times, arrogance. The third name is a name that no human will ever discover. This is a name that only a cat knows and will never tell. Whenever you see a cat deep in meditation, it is not simply dozing in the sun. It is contemplating this name, which is completely its own.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

In this chapter, we have an analysis not only of cats but also of the humans that name them. Simple names that are not well thought out may be given to a cat at first, and then modified as the owner learns more about the cat. The type of name that a person gives a cat, especially if it is a nickname, is completely dependant on the person bestowing the name.

People who prefer fanciful names often name their cats accordingly, just as people who prefer ordinary names do the same. The type of name that is given to a cat is a good explanation of the owner.

This is true of human names, as well. Nicknames develop over the course of someone's life, as they go through various experiences and develop their own unique personality. Many people treasure these names and do not readily reveal, them unless they know the other person quite well. Our first names are the names that are given when we are introduced to someone, much like the cats in this chapter, while we hold back our nicknames. The third type of name, the one that is never revealed, leaves much room for speculation. What do animals call themselves? Is the reason cats never come when they are called simply because we aren't addressing them by this hidden name?

The names Eliot uses in this chapter are extremely bizarre, such as Munkustrap and Bombalurina. These names would most likely not be given to cats in our current time, but they are humorous to read and attempt to speak aloud.





# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

The Old Gumbie Cat is a nickname given to Jennyanydots, the main character of this chapter. Jennyanydots is an industrious cat, although you would never know this by day.

All day long, a Gumbie Cat sits and sleeps, never giving any indication of what they do during the night.

At night, Jennyanydots becomes quite busy, taking care of the mice. At first, she begins teaching them crafts to occupy them and distract them from bad behavior. These hobbies include crocheting, tatting and music. During the day, she gives no indication of this previous night's work, as she finds the sunny spots in the house and lounges around.

The next night, Jennyanydots cooks the mice more nourishing meals, since she is sure that their current fare is to blame for the noise that they make. She is very busy making them mousecake of bread and fried peas, and lean bacon with a side of cheese.

Following this round of activity, Jennyanydots spends her afternoons wreaking havoc with the curtain cord. In addition, as usual, she sits upon the window sill, staying in one place all day. Jennyanydots doesn't stop with just the mice. Her next project is the cockroaches. She organizes them into a troop of respectable insects, much like the Boy Scouts, and gives them a purpose in life, along with a beetle's tattoo. Even though Jennyanydots gives the appearance of being lazy throughout the day, the order of the household rests in her paws during the night.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter is an amusing look at what people typically think of a lazy cat. All day long, these cats lie about, but no one ever knows what they do while the humans of the house are asleep.

Eliot's cat, Jennyanydots, is an industrious cat by night and a lazy cat by day. Gumbie Cats are the most typical kind of cat, and most cat owners can relate this chapter to at least one cat they have owned in their lifetime.

This chapter can also be applied to humans. Many people who give a public appearance of inactivity are actually busy performing good works out of sight of the rest of the world. A Gumbie Cat that is personified would be a person who does a lot of charitable work without making a big deal about those good deeds. Humble people who prefer not to have their name and deeds splashed all over the place also fit into the category of Gumbie Cats.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Growltiger's Last Stand is a thrilling account of an aging tomcat faced with his rivals when he least expects it. Growltiger is a Bravo cat, notorious for his deeds. He traveled on a barge and earned the nickname 'The Terror of the Thames.' His coat is rather worn and he is beginning to show his age. He is missing one eye and one ear. However, this has not resulted in reducing his stature among cats, least of all among foreign cats. A Siamese cat was responsible for the missing ear, and Growltiger has never forgotten this.

Growltiger is spending his evening romancing Lady Griddlebone on the barge, which has docked for the night. His companions, Grumbuskin and Tumblebrutus are not aboard, and his crew is asleep, leaving him alone with Griddlebone in the moonlight.

As the two sing a duet, they are quietly surrounded by Gilbert and his horde of Siamese cats. They have found the perfect opportunity to exact revenge for Growltiger's endless bullying. As Growltiger and Griddlebone continue singing, unaware of the danger, Gilbert sounds the charge and the Siamese cats swarm aboard.

Lady Griddlebone runs in fright, but it is not known where she went. Growltiger is too busy defending himself from the onslaught. As the Siamese cats surround him, he knows that he is beaten. They press him towards the plank and, to Growltiger's surprise, into the water he goes, at last the victim instead of the instigator.

The community of cats rejoices at this news, and rats are roasted whole in Brentford and Victoria Dock, to proclaim a celebration that Growltiger has been deposed. The Siamese cats declare a day of celebration in Bangkok, as well, as the threat of Growltiger's menace has finally been silenced.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Growltiger may be compared to more than just a bullying tomcat. On the surface, Growltiger appears to be a story about a cat that is feared for being a Bravo cat, a cat that always wins his fights. However, you can look at this chapter in another way. Instead of reading it simply with cats in mind, you can consider the example of Growltiger and compare him to a human counterpart. In fact, this chapter reads as an allegory concerning nations or leaders that spend their time bullying foreigners and their own people, and then are taken by surprise when they meet with resistance.

The sudden overthrow of Growltiger's regime can be compared to a military coup, especially when factoring in the celebration that results from the lifting of an oppressive yoke. The absence of his friends and the detail of his crew being sound asleep are indicative of the lack of internal support that usually precedes a military coup.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter is about Rum Tum Tugger, a cat that is dissatisfied with everything in life. No matter what he is given, he always wants something else. No matter where he is, he would rather be somewhere else. At first, he is offered a variety of foods, and always prefers the one he does not have. There is absolutely nothing that anyone can do about this, as Rum Tum Tugger is just that kind of cat. He will never be happy with what he has.

If Rum Tum Tugger were let outside, he would rather be in, and when he is in, he would rather be out. If anyone tries to keep him inside, he makes a large fuss. Again, there is nothing you can do about it; Rum Tum Tugger is the way that he is.

In addition to being contrary, Rum Tum Tugger has a destructive bent. He'll never come to see you, unless there is some way that he can create a disaster by doing so. He seems to love creating these disasters more than he loves getting attention. And there is nothing anyone could ever do about it.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Rum Tum Tugger is very much like a person who is never satisfied and habitually complains about everything. Every person has met at least one other human being in his or her life who could fit this description. No matter how hard people try to please such a person, they will never succeed.

This chapter is a solid character analysis of a person, not just of a cat. While you can consider this chapter to be a simple look at a cat, there is much more beneath the surface. There are, of course, some cats that would fit Rum Tum Tugger's description. However, it is apparent that Eliot is making a statement about a certain kind of person, as well.

In the repetition of the phrase, "And he will do, as he do do, and there's no doing anything about it," Eliot reminds us that it is pointless to go out of our way in an attempt to please someone like this. The odds of such a person changing are usually very slim, and you can easily exhaust yourself in the attempt.

Eliot also mentions that these particular ways can become a habit with this type of person. If they are allowed to continue in this behavior as children, they will generally develop into adults who can never be pleased by anything.

Dissatisfaction is something that is not akin to cats. They are most commonly portrayed as being very self-satisfied. Humans, on the other hand, are prone to this malady, and it is quite common to find someone who will complain about the smallest problem,

sometimes without even being prompted. However, as Eliot reminds us, there is nothing that can be done about that!



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

This chapter introduces the Jellicle Cats. These cats are black and white and not very large. They have a cheerful expression and a pleasant voice. All day long, they practice their moves, to be ready for the Jellicle Ball. These cats do not grow quickly and remain quite small throughout their lives. They spend their time waiting for the Jellicle Moon, and preparing themselves for the big occasion.

All day long, you would never suspect that these peaceful creatures lying about are in fact resting up for the Jellicle Ball. They are quiet all morning and all afternoon, as they save their energy for the big night. If the event is delayed due to weather, you might see a Jellicle cat dancing in the hall, but if it is nice and sunny outside, they will be getting ready for the Jellicle Ball.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Jellicle cats are somewhat different from Gumbie cats, mentioned earlier in the book. A Gumbie cat saves its energy all day in order to be resourceful at night, while a Jellicle cat is resting so that it can spend its evenings playing. Jennyanydots, the Gumbie cat mentioned in the beginning of the book, sleeps all day, just like a Jellicle cat. However, instead of sleeping to get ready for a ball, she is sleeping so that she can spend her nights taking care of her household, feeding the mice properly and organizing the cockroaches. Jellicle cats can be compared to people who do not spend their days working hard. Instead of working, they spend their lives looking busy while they are doing absolutely nothing.

There are references in this chapter that could easily be compared to high-society women, who don't hold down jobs, and spend all of their time preparing for the next big social event. The reference to the small size of the Jellicle cats is repeated in each verse of this poem. This may refer to their small-mindedness, as well as their physical size. Since they spend all of their time getting ready for one event, they waste the rest of their days. They do not grow beyond waiting for this event, choosing to focus instead on their extensive preparations.

There is also a continued reference to the color of the Jellicle Cats being black and white. This is a clue as to the intended meaning of the poem. During Eliot's time, the big event in London was always Opening Day at Ascot, a popular horseracing track. On Opening Day, all of the women dressed in black and white, with outrageously large hats. The time spent in preparing for this event was huge, and parallels the Jellicle Ball.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Mungojerrie and Rumpleteazer are a couple of cats that are up to no good. When these two cats get together, chaos is quick to follow. Their reputation is quite extensive in Victoria Grove. IN fact, they are known as far away as Cornwall Gardens, Kensington Square and Launceston Place.

These cats are accomplished trouble makers, and their area of expertise is very widespread, from opening windows to destroying basements, ruining roofs and stealing clothing and pearls. Their hapless owners are used to this behavior and simply blame all these events on one or the other of the two cats, and then drop the subject.

In addition to their usual petty crimes, Mungojerrie and Rumpleteazer are experienced cat burglars, yet they have made friends with the local policeman. When they add stealing the family's dinner to their long list of crimes, the family still does nothing. It seems that they are never quite sure which cat was to blame.

The reason that the family cannot tell which cat is to blame is due to the way the cats operate together. It is extremely hard to tell which one was responsible when both of them whirl through the house at the same time. No matter if there is a crash on the roof, or that a Ming vase is shattered, it is impossible to tell which cat caused the damage.

In the end, the family decides that both cats are to blame, but there is nothing that they can do about it.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Mungojerrie and Rumpleteazer could be compared to siblings whose families allow them to get away with murder. Whether it is destroying parts of the house or making off with something valuable, they are never punished. Although they attempt to make friends with people in authority, their reputation usually precedes them, wherever they go.

This chapter is not so much about the criminals themselves, but about the people who allow them to continue. If someone would put his or her foot down, the reign of destruction would most likely cease. However, blame is cast and nothing is done about it, as the family returns to the course of their day.

Since this chapter is more about the people who allow this kind of behavior, the two characters can be compared not only to animals that are spoiled, but to children and other relations or friends who are allowed to continue to act out, without fear of retribution. This activity will escalate, since they are never punished for their actions.

There is definitely a moral to this story. Bad behavior that is not punished will progress until serious or more costly crimes are committed.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Old Deuteronomy is an extremely old cat. He has gone through all nine of his lives, one right after the other. He has been talked about in poems and books since before even Queen Victoria walked the earth. He has had a number of wives (anywhere between nine and ninety-nine), although the true number is not known. Even the oldest inhabitants cannot believe that Old Deuteronomy is still alive.

While Old Deuteronomy takes his nap on market day in the High Street, the entire town works around him so as not to disturb his slumber. The sheep and cattle are turned away, and the cars drive on the sidewalks instead of the street. The entire village puts up a "road closed" sign to make sure that nothing will bother Old Deuteronomy.

When lunch is almost over, you can find Old Deuteronomy on the floor of the Fox and French Horn. If customers try to have one more round, the owner quickly hustles them out the back door, sternly reminding them that they mustn't wake Old Deuteronomy. He must be allowed to properly digest his lunch. Without another word, the customers shuffle out, carefully avoiding Old Deuteronomy.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Old Deuteronomy is a cat that has earned his place in the sun. He is much like a respected elder of a town; all of the inhabitants treat him with respect and some measure of awe. His last days will be spent in a life of ease, while everyone caters to his every whim.

Although these acts of veneration tend to throw the town into chaos, this does not stop them from making sure that Old Deuteronomy is comfortable. Closing the street on market day is quite a feat, and shows how much respect this character has earned among the inhabitants of the town.





# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

The Battle of the Pokes and the Pollicles begins with a brief explanation of Pokes and Pollicles. Pokes, of course, refer to the dog breed Pekinese, and Pollicles are a Scottish breed of dog. The Pokes and Pollicles do not get along and there is intense rivalry between the two breeds.

The day of the battle begins with the meeting of a Peke and a Pollicle on the street. After a week of peace, the Police Dog is nowhere to be found, leaving these two dangerous foes alone. Instead of immediately beginning to fight, both dogs stare at one another and begin to bark loudly until their barks can be heard throughout the park.

The Pokes in the neighborhood hear this commotion and run to their windows and doors to assist their fellow dog. Meanwhile, the Pollicles, who love a din, come rushing to the aid of their fellow Scot. All of the dogs begin barking loudly.

The entire neighborhood freezes, and some people call the Fire Brigade, But, out of nowhere comes a fierce cat, who is no other than the Great Rumpuscat. Everyone freezes as he enters the street. He makes no immediate move, but his eyes are blazing in the sun. Suddenly, he gives a great leap and all the dogs run for cover. By the time the Police Dog comes back to the street, there is no indication of what almost took place.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Although Pokes are mentioned throughout this book, this is the only chapter in the book that barely mentions cats. The Great Rumpuscat appears only briefly, but that is more than enough time for him to take care of the entire situation, before anything can happen.

The Great Rumpuscat is not described in great detail, and it is left up to the reader's imagination to figure out why the dogs are all so afraid of one cat. Is the Great Rumpuscat a hero or merely a bully? The nature of the dogs is revealed as being quite cowardly, while the cat is extremely brave. It is clear that Eliot was a much larger fan of cats than dogs.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Mr. Mistoffelees is known as the Original Conjuring Cat. His coat is black and he's not very large. He is certainly no ordinary, run-of-the-mill feline. His inventions are well known and he holds several patents. However, it is his magical powers that are the most amazing aspect of this cat.

The magic of Mr. Mistoffelees is a practical magic, one of natural ability, rather than smoke and mirrors. He can walk on the smallest ledge and slip through the tiniest cracks. He's quite talented at stealing the silverware and performing feats with spoons. Although he is not very gregarious, he gets into the strangest situations. You may hear his voice on the roof, but he appears to be sitting beside you. You can look for him for hours in the place you saw him last, only to find him where you least expected him to be. All of these events pale in comparison, however, to his feat of pulling seven kittens out of a hat.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Is Mr. Mistoffelees a magical cat, or simply a cat that is clever? His abilities are strange and unusual, but in our present time, we would most likely not refer to them as magical. Most cat owners have had a cat like Mr. Mistoffelees, a cat that cannot be contained.

The last feat mentioned in this chapter is Mr. Mistoffelees producing seven kittens out of a hat. This is, of course, a very improbable act for a cat to perform. This is where you can see that this poem is about more than just a cat. It is about owners of cats who would swear that their cat was the cleverest cat that was ever born. Some of the tales spun by these owners make Mr. Mistoffelees pale in comparison. This chapter is a very good character study on people who discuss their clever cats and embellish their actions to a degree that verges on the unbelievable.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Macavity is a Mystery Cat, a cat capable of many crimes. No police agency can stop him, no matter what he has done, because when a crime is discovered, he is nowhere to be found. Macavity is a special cat, a cat that levitate in the air, and who is not bound by the laws of gravity. His coat is ginger and his eyes are sunken. He does not take care of his coat or his appearance, and is very recognizable. This does not work against him, though, since whenever his crimes are uncovered, he is never there.

Macavity is a cat that can be seen almost anywhere, unless a crime has been committed, and then he is not there. Although he is a master criminal, he has been so successful that there are no records of his fingerprints in any criminal files. He is blamed for many crimes, some seemingly improbable. If a treaty disappears or negotiations go awry, everyone blames Macavity, but he is never there. When the police find out about a crime, Macavity's far away and you would never know to look at him what he just accomplished. His alibis are legendary, and his feats are renowned. They say he is the master fiend behind all despicable plans. He is the suspected ringleader of several wayward cats, but the evidence will never implicate him, since Macavity wasn't there.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Macavity is a sort of scapegoat, a cat that everyone blames for something that goes wrong, even if he wasn't anywhere near the scene of the crime. No matter what has been committed, people are quick to assign the blame, and Macavity is the one who is always implicated.

This story is an excellent allegory about scapegoats and how they are always blamed for things, they may not have been responsible for. When a crime goes unsolved, it is much easier to point to a mysterious known criminal who can never be apprehended than to leave the case open.

The mention of Mungojerrie and Griddlebone near the end of the chapter is very interesting. Griddlebone first appears in Growltiger's Last Stand, as the supposedly helpless bystander who is forced overboard. This story seems to point to a more sinister side of Griddlebone. Was she responsible for the Siamese victory over the dreaded Growltiger? The answer is not given, but the reader is left to assume that she may have been keeping Growltiger busy so that the Siamese cats could creep aboard his ship unnoticed.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Asparagus, or Gus, the Theater Cat, is a cat that spends his retirement years regaling his friends with tales of his experiences in the theater. His coat is not well-groomed, and he is very thin. His paws shake with palsy, but that does not stop him from talking endlessly of his past successes.

His best role was the part of Firefrorefiddle, the Fiend of the Fell, and he goes to great lengths describing his performances. There are not many cats that have performed in the theater, and Gus was one of the best. He knew seventy speeches by heart and performed most every part. However, all of these parts pale in comparison to the day he created Firefrorefiddle, the Fiend of the Fell.

The chapter ends with Gus complaining how the Theater has changed, and how young cats could not stand up to the rigors of his days as an actor. In his opinion, they are not disciplined enough and certainly not capable of achieving the greatness of Firefrorefiddle, the Fiend of the Fell.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Gus is an interesting cat who calls to mind older members of society who are no longer in their prime. Their days are spent remembering how things used to be, convinced that current-day practices never measure up. People like this believe that nothing can compare to the way things used to be, and so they generally live in discontent, miserable that the world has move on without them.

Although Firefrorefiddle, the Fiend of the Fell, is mentioned often in this chapter, Gus never reveals what the role contained. It is left to the imagination of the reader to conjure up images of Gus in his starring role.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Bustopher Jones is a black and white cat that is growing increasingly large. He has made his home on St. James' Street, and makes his daily rounds at all of the restaurants. There is no other cat that could ever compare to the majesty of Bustopher Jones. He is a favorite among the neighbors on St. James' Street, and everyone greets him as he walks by.

His mornings begin with occasional visits to Senior Educational. However, he cannot be seen there too often, as he is also a member of the Joint Superior Schools. After visiting these places, he heads off to his favorite pub, which is determined by the time of year. When game is in season, you will find him at Blimps or the Stage and Screen. When deer is in season, you can find him at Pothunter's, feasting on leftover bones. Before lunch is over, he stops off at Drones for a drink. His taste in food varies, and he can often be seen at the Siamese or Glutton's if he is in the mood for curry. However, if he looks as though he is depressed, he's just stopped at Tomb for a taste of mutton, rice pudding and cabbage.

This is how Bustopher Jones spends his days, going between pubs and restaurants. His routine rarely varies and it is apparent that he is quite overfed, as he weighs more than twenty-five pounds. However, he is convinced that he will "last out his time," following this routine for the rest of his life.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Bustopher Jones is an interesting cat, a cat that gets by on the kindness of others and never has to worry about his next meal. Many people picture stray cats as starving creatures, but some do luck out, as Bustopher Jones has, and are well cared for despite their lack of a home.

Jones can be compared to people who subsist on the kindness of others. They are commonly referred to as moochers and show up whenever there is free food to be found. No matter what, if they follow their routine, they can be assured of a good meal without every having to pay.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Skimbleshanks is a railway cat that runs the Night Mail train. If he's not there at 11:39, the train will not depart. Everyone begins searching for Skimbleshanks as the clock ticks to 11:42. Suddenly, Skimbleshanks appears and gives the signal that it's time to depart.

Of all of the cars on the Night Mail, Skimbleshanks is in charge of the Sleeping Car Express. He supervises everyone, from the passengers to the employees. As he monitors the corridor, he looks at passengers and keeps them in line.

The Night Mail train takes care of its passengers and provides them with all sorts of comforts. Whether they need tea upon waking or their bed turned down, the staff is always there. However, no one's dedication is as strong as that of Skimbleshanks, who makes sure that no mice will be joining you on your trip.

As everyone is sleeping, they are unaware of the lengths that Skimbleshanks goes to, to keep them safe. He keeps the night watch and makes sure everything runs as planned. When you have reached your destination, he gives a friendly wave. You can always count on Skimbleshanks to make the Night Mail run on time.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Skimbleshanks is the mascot of the Night Mail train. Whether he actually 'runs' it is a matter of opinion. You would most likely not run into Skimbleshanks today, as trains are dimming in popularity. However, in Eliot's time, they were the best way to travel.

A mascot is an odd and powerful thing, as people grow convinced that the mascot's presence is necessary for everything to run smoothly. If the mascot does not appear, these people become convinced that doom will certainly befall them. It's an odd superstition, in a way, that can be compared to mascots from football teams and good luck charms. People begin to associate the mascot with success and, from that point on, become convinced that success is not possible if the mascot is not there.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

There are many types of cats, and most are much like people. They all have distinct personalities and traits, and you have learned about their names. Now that you are aware of the different types and names of cats, how do you introduce yourself?

Dogs are different from cats, and don't mind familiarity. When you are addressing a cat, you must remember that formality is the rule. The nature of a dog permits you to approach them right away; they are happy for the attention and don't mind speaking to you at all. Addressing a dog is very different from addressing a cat, though.

When you approach a cat for the first time, it is best to come prepared with a gift, to break the ice. Until you know them well, it is best to stick to the formalities. Only when you have gained their respect may you begin to address them by their first name.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

In this chapter, Eliot reveals that the cats he has written about are much like everyday people (or, if not, then certainly like someone we may know). This is confirmation that the book is more than just a study of cats. It is a study of people, their habits and their quirks.

Eliot continues with his theme on cats and instructs the reader on how to properly address a cat. Cat lovers will certainly agree that his methods, although somewhat dated, would still apply today.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Cat Morgan is a cat who has lived a rich, full life. He was a pirate on the high seas, and has seen many things. However, now he is retired and he keeps the door at Faber and Faber. Although he was a fierce pirate, he has many good qualities. He may be lacking in manners, but his heart is as good as gold. Although he enjoys the comforts of retirement, he is still content with the fare of a pirate: cold beer and a bit of fish. He may not be the prettiest cat, but he gets the job done in Bloomsbury Square.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

This last poem is a brief addition that brings a close to the book. Cat Morgan is a simple cat, which is refreshing after reading some of the character studies. Eliot begins his studies with Jennyanydots and ends them with Cat Morgan, creating two stable bookends that keep everything together. Although the cats throughout the rest of the book definitely have their quirks, Cat Morgan is refreshing in his simplicity.





# Characters

## Jennyanydots

This cat is the Gumbie cat mentioned in the first chapter of the book. Jennyanydots spends her time taking care of her household and everyone in it, down to the mice and insects. She is a considerate cat who is concerned about everyone in her house. She is a tabby cat and has spots and tiger stripes on her coat.

## Growltiger

Growltiger is an infamous character referred to as a Bravo cat. He is feared throughout London, not only by cats, but by dogs and humans, as well. His coat is rumped and he is missing one ear and one eye. A Siamese cat tore off his ear, and his hatred of Chinese cats is legendary.

## Lady Griddlebone

This cat is mentioned twice in the book, once in "Growltiger's Last Stand," and once in "Macavity: The Mystery Cat." In the first story, she is the object of Growltiger's affections. In the second story, she is named as a possible accomplice of Macavity's. No physical description is provided, but she is portrayed as rather cowardly in "Growltiger's Last Stand."

## Grumbushkin

He is Growltiger's bucko mate and appears by name only in "Growltiger's Last Stand."

## Tumblebrutus

He is Growltiger's bosun. He also appears only once, in name, in "Growltiger's Last Stand."

## Gilbert

He is the leader of the Siamese cats who overtake Growltiger.



## Rum Tum Tugger

Rum Tum Tugger is never happy with what he has. He is constantly looking for something better, and is pleased when he can create a disaster. He is very curious and only likes food that he finds for himself.

## Jellicle Cats

The Jellicle Cats are a group of cats. They are black and white in color and very small. They are not very active, except on the nights when a Jellicle Ball takes place. They spend most of their time sleeping and bathing, in preparation for the Ball.

## Mungojerrie

He is Rumpleteazer's accomplice, widely known throughout London for his many deeds. Described as a burglar, smash and grab artist, Mungojerrie is a generally destructive cat.

## Rumpleteazer

He is a friend of Mungojerrie's and causes a great deal of trouble. He is also renowned throughout London for his many nefarious deeds.

## Old Deuteronomy

This cat is extremely old. He is described as being rather plain and having a bland face. He is extremely respected in his town and has been discussed in literature since before the reign of Queen Victoria.

## The Police Dog

This is the one canine that is named in the book. His job is to make sure that there is peace between the Pekes and the Pollicles. However, when duty calls, he is busy getting a drink at the Bricklayer's Arms.

## The Great Rumpuscat

This cat appears briefly in the chapter "The Battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles." He stops a battle with one threatening leap in the air. His eyes blaze like fireballs and he is a very fierce cat.



## Mr. Mistoffelees

Mr. Mistoffelees is the original conjuring cat. He's extremely clever and is capable of many amazing feats. He is small, quiet and completely black in color.

## Macavity

Macavity is a ginger-colored cat that is thin with sunken eyes. He does not take care of himself, but does comb his whiskers. He is known as the Mystery Cat and is blamed for a great many mishaps and misdeeds. He is the feline leader of a gang of criminal cats.

## Gus

The theater cat is very old, and extremely thin. His full name is Augustus and he suffers from palsy. He was an actor in his youth and spends his old age regaling everyone with stories of his days in the theater.

## Bustopher Jones

Bustopher Jones is a black cat with white feet that look like spats. He is a very large cat who is constantly fed by everyone in the neighborhood. You can usually find him in one of several restaurants throughout the day. He weighs at least twenty-five pounds.

## Skimbleshanks

Skimbleshanks is a cat with green eyes that is charge of the Night Mail train, and in particular the Sleeping Car. He checks on all of the passengers and is integral to its operation.

## Cat Morgan

This is a pirate cat that is mentioned in the last chapter of the book. He is the narrator of the chapter and briefly describes his life as a retired pirate, living at the office of Faber and Faber in Bloomsbury Square. He has a nice coat but his manners are not polished. However, he has a good heart and is loved by many.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Molesey**

The town where Growltiger's barge is docked on the night of Growltiger's last stand.

### **Bell**

The pub at Hampton that is visited by Grumblebuskin.

### **Lion**

A pub with a back yard where Tumblebrutus stalks his prey.

### **Jellicle Ball**

The big event for the Jellicle Cats. It takes place during the Jellicle Moon.

### **Victoria Grove**

The home of Mungojerrie and Rumpleteazer.

### **High Street**

The location of the market where Old Deuteronomy takes his nap.

### **Fox and French Horn**

A pub where Old Deuteronomy takes his afternoon nap.

### **The Park**

An unnamed park where the battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles is heard.

### **The Bricklayer's Arms**

A pub where the Police Dog from "The Battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles" gets a drink.



## **The Theater Door**

Gus, the Theater Cat, lives at the Theater Door.

## **St. James' Street**

The home of Bustopher Jones.

## **Senior Educational**

Infrequently visited by Bustopher Jones.

## **Fox's**

A pub mentioned in "Bustopher Jones: The Cat about Town."

## **Blimp's**

A pub frequented by Bustopher Jones.

## **Stage and Screen**

A restaurant mentioned in "Bustopher Jones: The Cat about Town." It is known for its winkles and shrimp.

## **Pothunter's**

A restaurant mentioned in "Bustopher Jones: The Cat about Town." They specialize in serving venison.

## **Drones**

A pub visited by Bustopher Jones.

## **The Siamese**

A restaurant that specialize in curry. A frequent stop of Bustopher Jones's.



## **The Glutton**

Another restaurant that specializes in curry dishes. Also frequented by Bustopher Jones.

## **The Tomb**

A restaurant that serves rice pudding, cabbage and mutton, mentioned in "Bustopher Jones: The Cat about Town."

## **The Night Mail**

The train mentioned in the story, "Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat."

## **Sleeping Car Express**

The sleeping car on the Night Mail.

## **Bloomsbury Square**

The new home of Cat Morgan.

## **Barbary Coast**

Where Cat Morgan used to sail.

## Setting

The poems in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* are not restricted to a specific time and place, but the few references establish the setting as twentieth-century England, primarily London.

## Social Sensitivity

Although Eliot obviously prefers Cats to Dogs (whom he characterizes as easygoing louts), generally he admires and satirizes his Cats without any discernible bias; social class and occupation seem irrelevant. The sole difficulties occur in his references to Siamese Cats as "Chinks" and Pekingese Dogs as "Heathen Chinese," terms used to emphasize their status as outsiders.





## Literary Qualities

Eliot's Cats have been much admired for their complexity of character. In relatively brief descriptions, the poet manages to capture the personality of the Cats and their human counterparts. The adult reader is aware of the human foibles being satirized, but as in fairy tales, evil is viewed from a rather detached perspective; and a light, whimsical tone is achieved through Eliot's puns, and his use of familiar rhymes and nonsense words. At the same time Eliot maintains a childlike point of view which makes the poems appealing to younger readers. Eliot's ability to capture the natural rhythms of speech also gives the poems an informality which adds to their appeal.

Like other Eliot poems these are filled with allusions, but here the allusions are to familiar rhythms rather than to literary works. Throughout his life Eliot wrote nonsense verse, and he was influenced not only by the nonsense verse of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll, but also by the songs of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Old Possum's Book of Cats illustrates Eliot's exceptionally good ear for rhythms; as the "Class Odist" for his Harvard graduating class, he was given the task of composing a class ode which could be sung to the tune of Tom Moore's "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms." These poems echo popular vaudeville and British music hall songs, familiar children's counting rhymes, and popular music of the 1920s.



# Themes

## Responsibility

This theme is found in three of the poems in *Old Possum's Guide to Practical Cats*. The first, *The Old Gumbie Cat*, is an example of a cat who is very responsible, even though it may not appear so at first glance. *Jennyanydots*, the cat in this poem, spends most of her days sleeping. However, at night, she is very resourceful and spends her time taking care of the forgotten creatures.

It is stated that a household could not function without a Gumbie cat. The Gumbie Cat is very much like a person who is extremely responsible and never shirks their duties. Even if you do not know how active they are in the community, they are normally quite busy.

The second example, in the poem, "*The Song of the Jellicles*," is an entirely different story. This is a group of cats who spend their days sleeping or taking care of themselves. Their nights are reserved for partying and dancing at the Jellicle Ball. You do not hear of any good works from these cats, and they are not portrayed as cats that do anything else with their time.

The Jellicle Cats are an example of people who do much the same thing. They do not spend their time in the pursuit of taking care of others, but in taking care of themselves. A household could easily function without a Jellicle cat, whereas a Gumbie cat is indispensable.

The third example is "*Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat*." He is a cat that spends his entire life at his job, and his dedication is astounding. He is heavily relied upon by everyone at the railroad, and the trains will not run without him. He is a most industrious cat who never sleeps on the job.

## Bigotry

Racial bigotry is present in "*Growltiger's Last Stand*" and "*The Awful Battle of the Peke and the Pollicles*." While Eliot may not have been a bigot, his characters and narrator certainly are. The Chinese characters, the Siamese and the Pekes, are portrayed as heathens.

In "*Growltiger's Last Stand*," *Growltiger* absolutely cannot stand foreign cats. This includes, in particular, all Siamese cats. A cat of this breed was responsible for the removal of *Growltiger's* ear. He is a known bully and is feared by cats who are foreign.

However, *Growltiger's* reward for his bigotry is a quick dunk after walking the plank. The Siamese cats rejoice in the removal of this despot, and it is not known what becomes of *Growltiger* after this point.



In the poem "The Awful Battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles," bigotry is introduced by the narrator. The Pekes, or Pekinese dogs, are referred to as "Heathen Chinese" and looked down upon because they are not British. Their language is referred to as "huffery, snuffery, heathen Chinese," as well. The Pollicles are Scottish dogs, and are portrayed as a pack of fighters. While this is somewhat better than referring to them as heathens, you can still feel that they are looked down upon by the narrator.

In this poem, there is no resolution of the apparent bigotry. Instead, it is forgotten as a cat breaks up the fight between the Pekes and the Pollicles.

## Respect

In our time, and especially in Eliot's time, respect for elders is a given. Whether you really like to listen to an old timer's stories or not, most people will grant them the respect that is their due.

In Old Deuteronomy, we see a cat that is quite old and has the respect of every resident in his town. People go out of their way to make sure that he is comfortable and taken care of. His whims are acceptable and indulged to at the point of disrupting the entire town.

He is not described as a cat who has performed any great feat, merely that he is old and, as such, respectable. His achievements are not spectacular, and no mention is made of any mark that he made on the town to deserve such treatment. It is merely stated that he is respected.

Gus, the Theater Cat, is an entirely different elderly cat. He has achieved much, but he is not respected like Old Deuteronomy. He is an acting cat that has performed with the best, and was celebrated in his prime.

However, in spite of these achievements, Gus has met with a very different fate. He is thin, and not cared for. He lives at the door of the old theater, where he once shone on the stage. He is not catered to, nor is he respected.

Why are these two cats portrayed so differently? You have one cat that has done little, and another who was quite successful. The former is well loved and celebrated, while the latter is not. The subtext from the narrator leads the reader to believe that this is due to social status. Gus never gained the type of status that Old Deuteronomy enjoys, and most likely never will. He is left to age in poverty, while the other will not have to worry about having his needs met.

This is similar to what still occurs in our society. Although these lines are blurring as time goes by, there is still an unspoken standard, especially among the wealthy. There are those who deserve respect simply for who they are, regardless of their contribution to society, and those who will never earn the same respect, even if they are well known.



## Themes/Characters

In the poem "How to Ad-dress a Cat," Eliot states the central theme of Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats: "Cats are much like you and me/ And other people whom we find/ Possessed of various types of mind." The Cats (the term is always capitalized) described in this book reveal a blend of human and feline qualities. Each Cat might be known by several names, and Eliot, as well, demonstrates that Cats, like people, have three distinct identities: the superficial or everyday, the unique or distinctive, and the most deeply personal. Eliot's distinctions are seen in the two personalities of Jennyanydots, the "Gumbie Cat." Called a "gumbie". because all day she does nothing but sit, at night Jennyanydots is extremely active, feeding and educating the mice and the cockroaches, and creating a well-ordered household. Likewise, the Jellicle Cats generally appear to be simply ordinary Cats, but when the Jellicle Moon appears, they become exceptional dancers.

The Cats, like their human counterparts, represent a wide range of character types. Growltiger, "The Terror of the Thames," is a villain, a bully, and a killer, but he has his sentimental side; while courting the Lady Griddlebone, he is attacked by the Siamese and made to "walk the plank." This results in worldwide rejoicing, but there is also a note of sadness in the loss of this larger-than-life villain who seems to have some of the appeal of gangsters in American movies of the 1930s.

Even more subtle rogues are Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer, who are responsible for all kinds of theft and destruction. Because the pair are charming and their alibis "plausible," the victims may attribute all disasters to this team, but the response is simply that "there's nothing at all to be done about that!"

The most sinister of the criminal Cats is Macavity, "The Hidden Paw," also known as the "Napoleon of Crime." Not only is this master criminal never present when any crime is committed, but he always has at least one alibi. Macavity's quite ordinary appearance belies his criminal activities, and no one has ever been able to connect him with any crime. Nevertheless, the rumor is that Macavity controls all the known criminal Cats and directs their activities.

Rum Tum Tugger is not a criminal Cat, but he is annoying because he is finicky and stubborn. He always wants something different from what he has or is given. He must have his own way; as Eliot says, "he will do/ As he do do/ And there's no doing anything about it."

Some of the Cats have jobs and other responsibilities. Gus (short for Asparagus) is the Cat on guard at the theatre door. He is also the guardian of theatrical tradition and delights in telling visitors of the glorious moments in his acting career. Trained in the more rigorous repertory theatre of the Victorian era, he laments the lack of discipline in the contemporary theatre and insists that "there's nothing to equal, from what I hear tell,/ That moment of mystery/ When I made history/ As Firefrowfiddle, the Fiend of the Fell."



Even more industrious is Skimbleshanks, a supervisor for the railroad. He is responsible for keeping an entire train, the Night Mail, running in an orderly fashion. In fact, the train cannot leave until he is aboard.

Cat Morgan, the doorkeeper for Faber and Faber, is a retired pirate who prides himself on his appearance and his pleasing personality. Although he lacks training in etiquette, he has developed the tastes of a gourmet, and he understands the operation of Faber and Faber.

In fact, anyone doing business with this publishing company would be wise to "make friends with the Cat at the door," usually by supplying one of his favorite treats.

Three especially distinguished cats are the Great Rumpuscat, Old Deuteronomy, and Bustopher Jones. When a brawl breaks out among Pekes, Pollicles, Poms, and Pugs, the Great Rumpuscat restores order simply by stalking out into the street; his fierce glare and great yawn cause the dogs to retreat immediately. Old Deuteronomy's years have won him recognition and respect. Nothing is allowed to disturb him, and even the Oldest Inhabitant must walk carefully to avoid stepping on him. In contrast, Bustopher Jones is active as a gourmet, a club member, and a bon vivant. He is always to be seen at the most fashionable restaurants and clubs, but his frequent dining is causing him to become fat.

Less obviously distinguished, but still quite talented, is the elusive Mr. Mistoffelees, who possesses all the skills of a magician. Master of prestidigitation, legerdemain, "eccentric confusions," he seems to be everywhere, and, though he looks innocent, he is actually performing every kind of trick.



# Style

## Point of View

*Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is narrated in the third person. You are aware of all of the aspects of the cats and you are a spectator to their capers. The narrator guides you through each poem and introduces every cat. Their good points are laid out and their deeds are then described.

It is obvious that Eliot was a big fan of cats, someone you would definitely call a "cat person." Dogs are somewhat looked down upon, especially the Pekinese breed. This may be due to the popularity of the Pekinese in London during the time this book was written.

You can easily tell that Eliot thinks more of cats than he does of dogs, and that the intended readers of this book are cat lovers. He originally wrote these poems for his friends, and several of the poems may even be caricatures of those friends.

## Setting

The book is set during Eliot's time, in London. Eliot was an expatriate who went to school in London and never came back to the United States. His deep entrenchment in British society is evident from the many references to it in this book.

Most of the cats live in posh neighborhoods in London. They have gardens and large houses, which are filled with nice furniture and collectibles, such as a Ming vase. The setting is very comfortable in most of the poems.

Once in a while, the setting moves to a different location. Old Deuteronomy, for instance, lives in a smaller town, and Growltiger lives on a barge. Wherever the cats are located, however, they most commonly appear in pubs and restaurants.

## Language and Meaning

Eliot used a lot of words that have fallen out of common use in the intervening years. This book is an interesting lesson in older words, such as *terpsichorean*. This word appears in *The Song of the Jellicle Cats* story and refers to the dancing abilities of the Jellicle Cats.

The names of the cats are fascinating and, while they may not be names you would ever select for a cat, they are unique. Grumbuskin and Bombalurina are not typical names for cats, as most people now prefer to give their cats the simple names that Eliot mentions in his chapter, "The Naming of Cats."



The language is very formal and typical of the times in which Eliot lived. Many of the words are used today, but in a different way, or with a different spelling, such as address. This book was meant to be read aloud, but some of the names are certainly tongue twisters.

## Structure

The book is divided into 15 chapters. The first chapter is an introduction that describes how cats are named. This is essential, as Eliot's cats all have very strange names. If the first chapter were not included, the rest of the book would make less sense. Eliot describes why his cats have such fanciful names and how the names are chosen.

The next twelve chapters are character studies of particular cats. Each cat is given its own descriptive poem. Most of the poems span two pages and give the reader an in-depth look at the type of cat and its character.

The fourteenth chapter is an instruction on how one may address a cat. Eliot informs the reader that the cats contained in this book are very much like people. This may have originally been the last chapter of the book, as it ties in well with the introductory chapter on the Naming of Cats.

The last chapter, Cat Morgan, is a brief poem that appears to have been added later. It is not clear why Cat Morgan's poem does not appear after Skimbleshanks's poem, but it is a nice closing poem for the book. While all of the preceding cats are quite complicated, Cat Morgan is refreshingly simple.



## Quotes

"His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name: His ineffable effable, effanineffable, deep and inscrutable singular name." Chapter 1, page 12

"So she's formed from that lot of disorderly louts, a troop of well-disciplined Boy Scouts, with a purpose in life and a good deed to do - and she's even created a Beetles' Tattoo." Chapter 2, page 16.

"Woe to the pampered Pekinese who faced Growltiger's rage." Chapter 3, page 17.

"Disposed to relaxation, and awaiting no surprise, but the moonlight shone reflected from a hundred bright blue eyes." Chapter 3, page 18.

"The ruthless foe pressed forward, in stubborn rank on rank: Growltiger to his vast surprise, was forced to walk the plank. He who a hundred victims and driven to that drop, at the end of all his crimes was forced to go ker-flip, ker-flop." Chapter 3, page 19.

"Yes, the Rum Tum Tugger is a curious cat, and there isn't any need for me to spout it. For he will do, as he do do, and there's no doing anything about it!" Chapter 4, page 22.

"They're quiet enough in the morning hours, they're quiet enough in the afternoon, reserving their terpsichorean powers, to dance by the light of the Jellicle Moon." Chapter 5, page 26.

"Or down from the library came a loud ping, from a vase which was commonly said to be Ming, then the family would say, 'Now which was which cat?'" Chapter 6, page 29.

"And so all the Pokes, when they heard the uproar, some came to the window, some came to the door; there were surely a dozen, more likely a score, and together they started to grumble and wheeze, in their huffery-snuffery, Heathen Chinese." Chapter 8, page 34.

"He can pick any card from a pack, he is equally cunning with dice; he is always deceiving you into believing that he's only hunting for mice." Chapter 9, page 38.

"Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity. For he's a fiend in feline shape, a master of depravity." Chapter 10, page 41.

"But there's nothing to equal, from what I hear tell, that moment of mystery when I made history as Fireforefiddle, the Fiend of the Fell." Chapter 11, page 46.

"It must and it shall be Spring in Pall Mall, while Bustopher Jones wears white spats!" Chapter 12, page 50.





"In the middle of the night, he is always fresh and bright; every now and then he has a cup of tea, with perhaps a drop of Scotch while he's keeping on the watch, only stopping here and there to catch a flea." Chapter 13, page 53.

"But always keep in mind that he resents familiarity, I bow and, taking off my hat, address him in this form: O Cat!" Chapter 14, page 56.

"I ain't got much polish, me manners is gruff, but I've got a good coat and I keep meself smart; and everyone says, and I guess that's enough, 'You can't but like Morgan, 'e's got a kind 'art.'" Chapter 15, page 59.

# Adaptations

In the 1950s Decca records issued a recording of Eliot reading from *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*. These poems, along with unpublished cat and dog poems (most notably "Grizabella: The Glamour Cat") supplied by the poet's widow, became the musical *Cats*, written by Andrew Lloyd Webber, directed by Trevor Nunn, choreographed by Gillian Lynn, and produced by Cameron Mackintosh. *Cats* opened in London in May 1981, and in New York in October 1982. The spectacular success of both productions led to touring companies that brought *Cats* to major U. S. cities.



## Topics for Discussion

How do the personalities of cats differ from the personalities of dogs?

How has language changed since Eliot wrote this book?

Do you think that the Practical Cats are really character studies of people?

Have you ever met someone who was like one of the Practical Cats? If so, which one, and in what way?

What are the differences between Gumbie Cats and Jellicle Cats?

Describe the similarities between Mr. Mistoffelees and Macavity.

Do you think Griddlebone was working as a secret agent for Macavity in "Growltiger's Last Stand?"

Describe the similarities and differences between Old Deuteronomy and Gus the Theater Cat.

1. Each of the Cats is so thorough a blend of human and feline characteristics that Angela Richards, who played Grizabella in the musical *Cats*, referred to the characters as half-cat and halfperson. What are the feline and human characteristics described in each Cat?
2. Eliot believed in the importance of rituals. What rituals are described in his descriptions of the proper way to treat Cats?
3. Some of Eliot's Cats seem larger than life, almost like characters in legends and myths. What kind of new myths and legends might Eliot have been trying to create?
4. Eliot drew his rhythms from a variety of sources. Read these poems aloud, and try to determine what specific source or kind of source supplies the rhythmic patterns. Is there any relationship between the rhythmic source and the theme of the individual poem?
5. One of the major themes in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is the layers of identity; people do not know the Cats very well. How well do most people know their pets? How well do most people know other people?
6. A critic has suggested that "The Old Gumbie Cat" is a satire on amateur social activists who try to improve the lives of the poor through projects such as Jennyanydots's nutrition classes and Boy Scout troops. In what ways is that thesis credible? What are its flaws?



7. Eliot abandoned his original plan to write a volume of verse about Cats and Dogs because he decided the Dogs could not possibly receive equal treatment. Is Eliot fair to Dogs? What qualities do Cats possess that Dogs do not?



## Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats is in the same tradition of nonsense verse as the works of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. In what ways do Eliot's Cats resemble Lear's Pussycat or Carroll's Cheshire Cat? What differences exist?
2. Which of Eliot's Cats is most admirable or least admirable? Why?
3. When critics say Eliot's Cats are complex characters, they mean that most of them cannot be labelled as totally good or totally evil. In fact, Eliot may have been trying to illustrate the difficulty of distinguishing between good and evil individuals. What negative characteristics are found in the admirable Cats, and what positive characteristics in the criminals?
4. Eliot frequently points out that a Cat is not really what he or she appears to be. List some examples of the differences between appearance and reality. What does Eliot seem to be saying about people's ability to discern reality?
5. The musical play Cats is based on these poems in Old Possum's Books of Practical Cats. Compare Eliot's poems with the songs in the musical. What changes were made?
6. For years the musical appeal of Eliot's Cat poems had been recognized, but the difficulty lay in staging and in developing a plot line. How were these difficulties resolved in the musical play Cats?
7. Among Eliot's other poems, the best known are "The Hollow Men" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Are some of the themes developed in Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats also found in these poems? What view of man and his world does Eliot express in these poems? In what ways are they different from Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats?



## Further Study

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. "Macavity and Moriarty." *The Baker Street Journal* 28 (1978): 103-104. A discussion of the influence of the Sherlock Holmes stories on Eliot.

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Clowder, Felix. "The Bestiary of T. S. Eliot." *Prairie Schooner* 34 (Spring 1960): 30-37. An argument that *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is serious and theological.

Douglass, Paul. "Eliot's Cats: Serious Play behind the Playful Seriousness."

*Children's Literature* 11 (1983): 109-124. A reply to Hodge in which Douglass insists that Eliot's purpose is not to judge his Cats but to fantasize things normally forbidden to children, to stress the value of daydreaming, and to express "Eliot's love for dog-, cat-, and mankind, and his desire to keep alive in himself the irreverent child."

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*Children's Literature* 7 (1978): 129-146. Suggestion that the themes in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* are the familiar Eliot themes of "the imperfectibility of catkind/mankind" and the need for "order in a violent, chaotic world."

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