Whittington Study Guide

Whittington by Alan Armstrong

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

This novel for young people entwines two contemporary plot lines with a retelling of a classic fable - the story of Dick Whittington and his remarkable cat, as told by a cat who is, in many ways, remarkable himself. As all three plot lines explore issues relating to the power of courage to overcome difficulties, the book also explores the nature and value of friendship, compassion, and interdependence.

The story begins with a meeting between The Lady, a somewhat self-important duck, and Whittington, a lonely and somewhat ugly cat. After Whittington tells The Lady that he is looking for both a home and friendship, The Lady agrees to introduce him to the other members of the animal community in which she lives. The other animals are at first reluctant to welcome another predator into their group, but The Lady convinces them to do so, and Whittington has a new home in the barn of a farmer named Bernie, who has a habit of bringing home animals who need special care and/or attention.

Bernie's two grandchildren, Abby and Ben, visit the barn and its inhabitants regularly. One day, in order to entertain both the children and the other animals, Whittington begins telling the story of the boy after whom he was named, Dick Whittington, who began his life in desperate poverty but over the course of several years and after several adventures, became the Lord Mayor of London. Over the course of the winter, and as Bernie brings several new arrivals into the barn community, Whittington continues his story, telling how Dick escaped his life of poverty, made his way to London, found himself a new home and a new line of work, and made friends with a remarkable cat who became his best friend. Eventually, Whittington says, Dick voyaged across the sea to exotic lands, at one point leaving his cat behind and at a later point happily being reunited with her, but at a still later point eventually losing her during a storm at sea. Whittington adds, however, that she left behind two kittens, one of whom was his ancestor. Eventually, Whittington says, Dick married the love of his life, became a successful merchant, and eventually was elected Lord Mayor.

Meanwhile, over the course of the several weeks that Whittington is spinning out his story, he continues to deepen his friendships with the animals in the barn, and with Bernie's grandchildren, one of whom (Ben) has troubles of his own. He has difficulty reading, and despite the help of his sister and the animals, and despite the inspiration provided by the story of Dick Whittington, he finds himself unable to progress as rapidly as the principal of his school thinks he should. Fearful and resentful of being teased by his classmates, Ben at first resists additional efforts to help him improve his reading, but a visit to a special Reading Recovery program, taught by the inspiring Miss O'Brian, known as Coach O, convinces him that he should try what she suggests.

Winter turns into spring, and spring turns into summer. More animals are brought to the barn, and young animals are born and taken care of. Sometimes there is violence between the animals in the barn or as the result of attacks from outsiders, but the friendship and support of the animals within the barn quickly makes things peaceful again. Meanwhile, Whittington continues to tell his story, and Ben continues to struggle

to read. One day, however, close to the end of the summer, Whittington announces his intention to leave his barn family and take one of his children, who was born to a lady cat up the road, to meet Whittington's previous owner. Ben, meanwhile, reaches the reading goal set for him by Coach O, and the book ends with a sense of celebration all round. The friendships born in the barn and nurtured by the life there have brought their rewards.

Section 1, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

Section 1, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 Summary

"Whittington Meets The Lady"

As she makes her way to her pond, an unattractive duck (The Lady) meets an unattractive cat (Whittington), who responds to The Lady's comments about the strangeness of his name by saying it's a name from history. He says he was cast out of his home after the boy who owned him was sent away to school because his highly educated parents were embarrassed by his inability to read, and how the boy's parents stopped taking care of him after he (Whittington) got into a fight with a neighbor tomcat and killed it. The Lady scoffs that that's what tomcats do, they fight, particularly when it's important (see "Quotes, p. 5). Whittington agrees, saying that he needs a place to live and wants to join the animals in The Lady's barn, and adding that he's good at hunting rats. After commenting that the rats in the barn are a problem, The Lady asks why he's asking and not just taking a place. Whittington explains that he wants the companionship (see "Quotes", p. 6).

"The Animals in the Barn"

This brief chapter describes the other animal occupants of the barn - Coraggio the rooster and the egg-laying bantam hens, the horses, the threatening and hungry rats, and Bernie the farmer. The chapter concludes with a brief commentary on The Lady's place of authority in the barn (see "Quotes", p. 9).

"Bernie and How he Got the Horses"

This chapter describes how Bernie, a quiet older man with grandchildren, a temper, and a fondness for cigars, came to own the horses. He'd always loved horses, even though he couldn't ride them and never wanted to use them for work. Narration describes how the chance came for him to purchase a pair of near-retirement horses named Aramis and Li'l Spooker, how he got them home with the help of his talkative friend Ted and his garage-owner friend Al, and how the horses were nervous at first, but soon got used to the place and the other animals.

"Abby and Ben Meet the Horses"

This chapter introduces Bernie's two grandchildren, ten year old Abby and eight year old Ben. They live with Bernie and his wife Marion because their mother is dead and no-one knows where their father is. Narration describes how they quickly became close friends with the horses, a friendship that spilled over into the horses' relationship with Bernie (see "Quotes", p. 16).

Section 1, Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 Analysis

This novel for young people follows two narrative lines, one inspired by the other. The main narrative line, Whittington's relationship with the animals and people on the farm, begins in this section with the introduction of the central character (Whittington), his situation (cast out from his home and looking for a new one), his friendships (with The Lady) and his goal (to find friends). The parallels between this narrative and the secondary one (the story of Dick Whittington) also begin in this section, even though that second narrative hasn't itself started. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - List and discuss the ways in which Whittington's journey through the narrative ...").

During this introductory section, several narrative elements are introduced that foreshadow later developments in the narrative. These include The Lady's reference to tomcats fighting, especially when needed, which foreshadows Whittington's fight with Havey in the following section, and her reference to the problems with the rats, which foreshadows the rats' appearance in the following section. A particularly important piece of foreshadowing is Whittington's reference to his previous owner, in that the reference foreshadows two key elements of the narrative - Ben's troubles reading and Whittington's concern, and the book's final moments, in which Whittington says he intends to go on a journey to find the boy. Finally, there is the reference to the circumstances of Abby and Ben living with Bernie and Marion, which foreshadows developments in Ben's reading situation (see Chapter 23, and also "Quotes", p. 106).

The narrative introduces one of its key themes in this section - the nature and value of interdependence, between animals and animals as well as between animals and humans. This aspect of the work manifests itself in several specific ways throughout the narrative, but always from the thematic perspective that such interdependence is a good, healthy, useful, and reliable thing.

Section 2, Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8

Section 2, Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 Summary

"The Lady Tells the Barn about Whittington"

When The Lady tells the inhabitants of the barn about Whittington, many say they don't want another predator around; there's enough trouble with the rats. The Lady reminds them all that if it had not been for Bernie giving them a home when they needed one, they'd all be dead (see "Quotes", p. 19 - 1). The animals accept Whittington's presence, but wonder how things will work out (see "Quotes", p. 19 - 2).

"The Animals Tell Whittington about Themselves"

The Lady brings Whittington in the barn, tells him about life with Bernie and the children, and then she and the other animals speak of their background, as individuals and as breeds. Whittington says nothing the whole while, keeping his knowledge about the ancient history of cats to himself. The one-eyed leader of the rats, the Old One, also says nothing, thinking not only of the history of rats brought everywhere by man, but also about cats, which he had never seen but which, he knows, kill rats ... just like snakes.

"Havey and the Cat's Surprise"

The Lady warns Whittington about Havey (short for Havoline), a bad tempered female dog that Bernie keeps behind the gas station but occasionally brings out to the barn. Havey chasing the horses and The Lady is the only exercise any of them gets, but Havey is mean, and likes to humiliate the other animals. Whittington and The Lady hatch a plan to teach Havey a lesson, and on the next visit, put it into action. The resulting fight between Havey and Whittington leaves them both with missing clumps of hair which, narration says, all grows back. From then on, narration comments, Havey leaves The Lady alone, while Whittington is no longer wobbly in his walking. The Lady believes the shaking up he got in the fight has sorted him out.

"The Last Day for Baths"

With a feel of snow in the air, the animals take their last dust baths. Later, Whittington and The Lady go out to the field and watch the crows picking up the last of the corn, but are chased off by Gregory, the watchful guard-crow. After they hurry back to the barnyard, the two friends hide in the shade and have a nap.

Section 2, Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 Analysis

The work's thematic focus on the nature and value of friendship begins in this section, as Whittington starts making friends with the barn animals, and particularly with The

Lady, a friendship that later proves very important to both characters and, simultaneously, foreshadows the growth of several other important friendships. At the same time, however, the tension between Whittington and the rats also begins, foreshadowing moments later in the work where tension increases to the point where Whittington erupts in violence (see Chapter 9).

Other foreshadowing in this section includes the reference to the ancient history of cats (foreshadowing the revelation in Chapter 31 that Whittington is a descendent of such cats - see "Quotes", p. 131) and The Lady's reference to Bernie bringing animals home. This foreshadows the arrival of other animals (Blackie the hen in Chapter 17, and William the goat in Chapter 27). Meanwhile, Whittington's capacity to fight, first mentioned in the previous section, is shown here in his attack on Havey whose name, narration comments, is short for Havoline, a brand of motor oil that Bernie uses at the Texaco gas station where he works.

Section 3, Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12

Section 3, Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 Summary

"The Lady asks Whittington to tell his Story"

One day, after the first heavy snow and with all the animals but Havey in the barn, The Lady asks Whittington to tell his story. He begins by referring to the boy who went west, but can't go on because thinking of the boy he loved makes him sad. One of the rats laughs, but the Old One tells him to be quiet. "Listen to your blood enemy," he says, "and you may learn enough to save your lives." Whittington says he is the descendent of the cat who helped the famous Dick Whittington (see "Characters"), and comments on the reason why no-one who remembers Dick's story can remember the name of the cat (see "Quotes", p. 35). Once he finishes the story, he darts away and kills one of the rats, and The Lady comments that that's one less rat to worry about. Bernie, Havey and the children arrive, bringing treats for the animals. After eating some tuna and drinking some milk, Whittington begins to purr, a sound that Ben says he probably hasn't made for some time.

"The Man Whittington Named Himself After"

As another snowstorm builds, Bernie leaves Abby and Ben with the animals in the barn, who settle themselves in to keep each other warm. The Lady tells Whittington to go on with his story. Whittington tells of Dick's childhood in a town emptied by the Black Plague, and how he lived with his grandmother, who taught him how to read and how to make medicines from herbs. Whittington also speaks of how Dick learned and dreamed about the possibility of money and prosperity in the city of London, and how he resolved to leave for London and make his fortune.

"Dick's Dream"

Conversation between the children and the animals turns to reading, with Abby revealing that Ben has difficulty reading and Whittington, in turn, remembering the boy he had loved. Narration reveals that Abby is also having trouble in school because ever since her mother died, she has had trouble concentrating. Narration also reveals how Marion has become a teacher's aide, how scared Ben is of reading, and how worried Abby is about him. The Lady arranges for Abby to bring some books and help Ben learn the way Dick's grandmother taught HIM to read, and Whittington goes on with the story.

"Dick Goes to London"

Whittington tells the animals and the children how the eight year old Dick (Ben is the same age) so desperately wanted to get to London that he tied himself onto the back of a carriage driven by a scarred coachman named Will and an angry Land Agent. The Land Agent demanded that Will force Dick off, but Will, who felt sorry for Dick, refused. Dick was allowed to stay, and as the Land Agent's journey continued, Dick made himself

not only useful, but welcome. Eventually, Dick told Will of his dream, and when Will suggested that London is a harsh place, Dick commented quietly that "there's nothing to go back to."

Section 3, Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12 Analysis

The work's second narrative line, the story of Dick Whittington and his cat, begins in this section. As previously discussed, there are several key parallels between the stories of Dick, Whittington, and the other characters, animals and children alike. For further consideration of these parallels, see "Topics for Discussion - List and discuss the ways ..." and "In what ways..." Important points to note in this second narrative line include the portrayal of the coachman, Will Price (who later turns up and plays an important role in Dick's life yet again) and in the emergence of Dick's dream to go to London, a dream that drives both him and the action of this secondary narrative line.

Other points to note in this section include developments in the relationship between Whittington and the rats. There are several points to note here. First, this conflict was foreshadowed in earlier comments that he's a ratter and that he's prepared to fight when necessary. The conflict here foreshadows the moment later in the narrative (Chapter 13, in the following section) when The Lady negotiates a peace between the rats and the rest of the barn animals. Meanwhile, there is another important piece of foreshadowing in this conflict - specifically, in the revelations later in the work of the character of Dick's cat, who was/is reputed to be a great rat hunter. The portrayal of Whittington here as just such a hunter foreshadows his later comments that he is a direct descendant of that original cat. Third, it's interesting to consider whether the rat Whittington kills is the one who laughed at his apparent sadness at remembering the boy he loved. Narration never actually says it is, but it would appear to make sense.

Other important points in the main narrative line are Ben's reference to Whittington's purring, which suggests that Whittington is happy for the first time in a long while (a cat generally purrs only when s/he is content) and the reference to Abby's difficulties in school, another foreshadowing of Ben's similarly emotional difficulties (see Chapter 39).

Section 4, Chapters 13, 14 and 15

Section 4, Chapters 13, 14 and 15 Summary

"Dick Arrives in London"

When Dick arrived in London, and after Will and the Land Agent went on their way, he discovered that the city was not nearly as prosperous as he believed, and soon was reduced to begging for food. At one point, he was chased away from the home of a merchant by the household's cook, but the merchant himself took Dick in. Here the story stops; Whittington has just seen a rat emerge to collect some food and is ready to pounce. The Lady stops him and negotiates a truce; the rats will leave the eggs and chicks alone as long as they get a share of the grain left by Bernie, and Whittington leaves them alone. Whittington asks why he should agree, and The Lady says they may be able to help him someday, just like in the fable (see "Objects/Places - The Fable of the Lion and the Rat").

"Dick is Given a Home"

The next day, after playing with Bernie in freshly fallen snow, the kids return to the barn. Abby has brought a book of Bible stories and parables with her in order to help teach Ben to read, but The Lady decides that Whittington should tell more of his story first. Whittington tells how the merchant Hugh Fitzwarren brought Dick into his home, and was pleased to learn that, because of what he learned from his grandmother, Dick knew a great deal of the various plants and herbs Fitzwarren grew in his garden. Fitzwarren, Whittington says, was a fabrics merchant dealing in various exotic cloths, but grew an equally exotic variety of plants started from seeds brought back by sailors bringing the fabrics from the Far East.

"The Boy Goes to Work for Fitzwarren"

Whittington describes how Dick, when he accompanied Fitzwarren to the docks to do business, quickly absorbed the merchant's ways and soon started assisting him, rapidly gaining a reputation for responsibility and reliability. Whittington also describes how Dick sometimes got homesick, particularly when he listened to London's bells (see "Quotes", p. 70). At that point, Whittington says, the cat comes into the picture. The Lady comments that she had been wondering where the cat was, but then says it is time for Ben to start his reading lesson.

Section 4, Chapters 13, 14 and 15 Analysis

What might be described as a third narrative line, Ben's learning to read, begins in earnest in this section. Here again, there are parallels between this story and that of Dick Whittington (see "Topics for Discussion - In what ways ..."). Also in this section there are several important pieces of foreshadowing, and in more than one dramatic

line. The Lady's comment to Whittington about the truce between the rats foreshadows the moment later in the narrative when what she foretells here actually comes true, and the rats become important to Whittington (see Chapter 40). This moment is also important for thematic reasons, since it dramatizes once more the work's thematic interest in the necessity for, and value of, interdependence. In the secondary narrative line, Dick's story, the discovery of Fitzwarren's passion for his garden and for exotic plants foreshadows several developments later in the narrative when his desire to bring even more such plants to his garden plays a key role in determining Dick's course in life. One final piece of foreshadowing in this section also occurs in the second narrative line, the reference to Dick's reaction to the bells (see "Objects/Places"), an important part of the legend of Dick Whittington that foreshadows his confrontation with his desires for Mary and/or his destiny in Chapter 36.

Section 5, Chapters 16, 17 and 18

Section 5, Chapters 16, 17 and 18 Summary

"Ben's First Reading Lesson in the Barn"

Whittington directs Abby to sit next to Ben and show him letters and words, just the way Dick's grandmother showed Dick. They start with the Psalms from the Bible (see "Objects/Places") and immediately run into difficulty - the silent "p" at the beginning of psalms. Abby writes it out in large letters on one of the stanchions in the barn so the animals can all see, and explains to Ben that sometimes letters are silent. As the lesson progresses, Whittington realizes that Ben has the same difficulty as the boy who loved him - he has dyslexia (i.e. mixes up letters). Whittington suggests that Ben do what the boy did, memorize lists of words. Later that night, Bernie comes in with some water for the animals, and is surprised when he sees the "psalm" Abby had written on the stanchion.

"Blackie Arrives"

The following day, Bernie brings home a hen named Blackie, whose feet had frozen the night before and whose owner had left her for him along with a pair of cigars. Bernie prepares a hutch for her, and she and Coraggio immediately become fast friends.

"Dick Meets His Cat"

The next day, to avoid another lesson for Ben becoming MORE frustrating, The Lady asks Whittington to go on with his story. Whittington tells how, when Dick was ten years old, he got some money from Fitzwarren as a present. When Dick went down to the docks to see what he might spend it on, he met a cat that looked at him directly (see "Quotes", p. 78) and made Dick feel as though they belonged together. That cat, Whittington says, was his great-great-grandmother's grandmother. Dick bought the cat from its owner, an old, thin man, and took it back to his new home with Fitzwarren, where the cook initially tried to scare it off, but relented when it started catching rats. That night, Fitzwarren entertains a sailor/merchant who, after a few drinks and having the cat in his lap, tells Fitzwarren of a powerful, medicinal herb from the Far East called amapacherie. Later that evening, Fitzwarren and the sailor agree that Dick and the cat should travel with the sailor and act as Fitzwarren's agent for fabrics, seeds and plants. After making several preparations, and ALMOST receiving a hug from Fitzwarren, Dick and his cat boarded the boat.

Section 5, Chapters 16, 17 and 18 Analysis

This section introduces several important elements that play important roles later in the narrative. The first is the writing of the word "psalm" (see "Objects/Places"), the first of several words that are listed on the stanchion and the word that, at the end of the book,

Whittington and his best friends (Abby, Ben and The Lady) take particular note of before Whittington sets off on his journey. The importance given to "psalm," both the word and the concept, suggest a layer of Christianity in the work's thematic subtext. The narrative never makes it entirely clear what that layer is intended to specifically mean. It's possible, though, that because the Psalms are essentially a celebration of the relationship between God and life on earth, the celebration of friendship and interdependence that lies at the work's narrative and thematic core is, on some level and in some way, a similar sort of celebration. Meanwhile, the themes of friendship, interdependence and compassion all reemerge in this section with the arrival of Blackie the hen.

In the second narrative, the story of Dick Whittington, there are also several key points. The first, of course, is the introduction of the cat, an incident which essentially turns his story around and sends both it and his life in a different direction. The character of the old man reappears later, is named as Sir Louis Green, and becomes another key character in Dick's life who turns his life in a different direction. It's interesting to note here that the narrative never explicitly says that the cat belonged to Green, but rather implies that the cat, apparently gifted with the capacity for some kind of otherworldly, almost psychic insight, knew that he was in the right time and the right place to meet someone like Dick with whom she was simply meant to be. Meanwhile, Whittington's comment that he is descended from that cat comes as something of a surprise, but an engaging one. His family history, it seems, is profoundly important to him, and seems to play a key role in his eventual decision to leave the barn, to seek out the boy who loved him, and to pass on to him the latest descendent in the mysterious, miraculous family line.

Section 6, Chapters 19, 20, 21 and 22

Section 6, Chapters 19, 20, 21 and 22 Summary

"Out with the Owls"

One night, Whittington talks Abby, Ben and The Lady into going out and calling for owls. Ben's calls are so successful that one comes flying, and then gets so angry at being fooled that it drops its still warm prey. The prey falls on Ben's shoulder. He screams, and he, Abby and the animals run back to the barn. After Bernie collects Abby and Ben, Whittington and The Lady settle down to sleep.

"Spooker is Sick"

One morning, Abby and Ben notice that Li'l Spooker isn't as active as she usually is. Bernie gets help from the veterinarian, and soon Spooker is back to normal, forgetting "how they'd tied her up and purged her and made her mouth hurt. Forgetting is forgiving."

"Ben's Reading"

Narration describes the beginnings of spring, and how Ben's reading starts to improve once he and Abby begin concentrating on small words and on some of Dick's sayings like, "Tell the truth and shame the devil." When Abby worries that Ben is not reading but reciting, Whittington tells her that that's how Dick learned. The Lady sees Ben getting angry and asks Whittington to go on with his story.

"To Africa on the Unicorn"

Whittington describes how Dick was seasick for part of the journey to Africa but eventually got better, how his cat got rid of all the rats on the ship and how, when the ship landed in Tripoli, he was taken to the king's palace. There, Whittington says, Dick started negotiations with the king for the fabrics and spices Fitzwarren had asked him to obtain. When the king discovered how good the cat was at catching rats, he decided that he had to have her, adding merchandise to the deal in the hopes of obtaining her in exchange. Dick was reluctant to give her up, but looked into the cat's eyes the same way he did when they met, and was reassured that everything would be fine. Just as the king was adding jewels to the deal, the cat ran off and killed another rat, leading the king to ask Dick one last time what he wanted in exchange for her. Dick remembered the mysterious amapacherie herb he and Fitzwarren had been told about and asked for it. The king realized how valuable the cat and her children would be to him and his country and agreed. Dick prepared to leave without seeing the cat again (see "Quotes", p. 102).

Section 6, Chapters 19, 20, 21 and 22 Analysis

Owls are ancient symbols of wisdom and insight. The idea that Ben successfully calls an owl metaphorically suggests that he is "calling" wisdom to him (i.e. learning to read), but is also fearful of what that wisdom brings, a metaphoric foreshadowing of his fear and/or reluctance to engage fully in the process of learning to read. Meanwhile, the work's thematic emphasis on interdependence develops not only through the narrative of Ben's continuing struggles to learn to read but also through the story of Spooker, whose health is restored to her as the result of her dependence on Bernie and his, in turn, dependence on the help of the vet.

In the secondary narrative, Dick's story, the theme of friendship are developed through Dick's increasing trust in his cat, who seems here, as elsewhere in the story, to be telling Dick that no matter what he fears, for her and for himself, he can trust that things will work out well. This is a lesson, it seems that is also being applied to Ben, a lesson that will be applied further into the narrative as he is faced with more and more triggers of his fear of being laughed at.

Section 7, Chapters 23, 24, 25 and 26

Section 7, Chapters 23, 24, 25 and 26 Summary

"The Registered Letter"

Marion picks up a registered letter for her and Bernie at the post office and learns several things - that there are concerns at Ben's school about his reading difficulties and his bad temper, that there are plans to have him tested, and that he might need to go to a special class. When Marion and Bernie tell Ben, he cries out (see "Quotes", p. 104) and Abby comes running. She tells her grandparents about her efforts to help Ben read and how kids in the special class get teased, but Bernie and Marion realize they have to go along with the tests - they are only Ben and Abby's guardians, not their adoptive parents, and don't want to risk having them taken away.

"Ben's School Principal Visits the Texaco"

Ben's principal, Dr. Donald Parker, brings his car into Bernie's gas station for service. While there, Bernie tells him what Abby said, and Parker says she's right, a lot of kids get teased and some of them break under the pressure, but many become stronger. He and Ben agree that the test will be postponed if Ben plans to observe a Reading Recovery class, which Parker says has been helpful in improving the reading of other students.

"Reading Recovery"

Bernie thinks a long time and then tells the rest of the family about the deal with the Principal. When Ben becomes worried, Marion gives him a hug (see "Quotes", p. 110). Out in the barn, Whittington has a bad coughing fit, and The Lady is worried, but Whittington assures her it's only a hairball.

"Dick Sees a Beautiful Girl in Black"

As spring comes, it brings with it heavy rain, which causes Aramis to become ill. He, like Li'l Spooker earlier, is treated by the veterinarian. Meanwhile, Ben's reading continues to improve. After a particularly good day, The Lady tells Whittington to resume his story.

He tells how Dick returned home without his cat, how pleased Fitzwarren was that he had done so well, and how the amapacherie turned out to not work. Meanwhile, Dick went to visit the old man who sold him his cat, who is revealed to be Sir Louis Green. Green welcomed him into his home, which was filled with exotic books and maps. A young woman in a black dress poured Dick and Sir Louis a drink, and when Dick seemed struck by her beauty, Sir Louis told him that she is his granddaughter. Dick told Sir Louis what happened in Tripoli, and offered Green a share of the payment Fitzwarren offered for his services, adding that he intended to give another share to Will Price, the coachman who drove Dick to London. Sir Louis refused the payment, and told

the surprised Dick that Will worked for him, making a mysterious pronouncement at the same time (see "Quotes", p. 118). Dick realized he could trust Sir Louis and gave the old man the jewels and gold he had been given by Fitzwarren to invest.

Section 7, Chapters 23, 24, 25 and 26 Analysis

At this point, it's worth taking a look at what appears to be several coincidences in the story of Dick Whittington - his finding the cat, the cat sitting on the doorstep of a wealthy and influential man who helps Dick, and that man being friends with the man who first gave Dick a chance, among others. While it may seem to many readers that this chain of coincidences is too unlikely to be realistic, there is also the sense, about the story of Dick Whittington, that one of ITS themes has to do with the power and inevitability of that which is meant to be. There is the sense, in fact, that Dick's cat is a kind of conduit, or means of connection, between the present and the future; as previously discussed, she seems to be able, to some degree and in some way, to foretell the future, and to assure Dick that everything will work out for the best. In other words, she and these "coincidences" seem to be offering a lesson in faith and trust, and that all is as it is meant to be, in spite of doubts and fears to the contrary. Meanwhile, the appearance of the young woman in black foreshadows her later appearances throughout the narrative and her increasing importance to Dick, while Sir Louis' pronouncement foreshadows Whittington's comments at the end of the narrative regarding what Dick eventually did with his life.

Other noteworthy elements in this section include the sense of increased stakes and/or narrative tension in Ben's narrative line, and Whittington's hairball, a vignette that makes another metaphoric suggestion - that what can seem like a serious affliction can, in fact, be only temporary. The implication here, made by both the vignette itself and its juxtaposition to developments in Ben's story, is that the difficulties Ben is facing are themselves only temporary.

Section 8, Chapters 27, 28, 29 and 30

Section 8, Chapters 27, 28, 29 and 30 Summary

"Two Newcomers Join the Barn"

Bernie's friend Al purchases a lone goat and a noisy rooster ("money for life," narration comments) and takes them to Bernie's. The next morning, the kids and Bernie are surprised to see the new arrivals, naming the rooster Brahms and the goat Willy.

"Dick's Cat Returns"

Whittington describes how, as he approached his sixteenth birthday, Dick took increasing responsibility in Fitzwarren's business. On the advice of Sir Louis, whom he met at his home and where he again saw his beautiful granddaughter, he purchased one quarter of that business, later learning that Fitzwarren intended to leave him the entire business when he died. One day, on a visit to the docks, Dick saw the Unicorn had returned from its latest voyage and discovered his cat, whose leg was all twisted. He picked the cat up, and she told him how she had been wounded in a fight with the palace rats, how the king had his doctors try to heal her, how she got well but not well enough to keep hunting, and how the king decided to let her go. She told how she left the palace in the care of her children and grandchildren, and added that she'd heard Dick was to be sent to Persia. Sir Louis, she says, owns The Unicorn. Dick asked the cat whether she'd go with him, and she agreed, stretching happily.

"A Hawk Attacks The Lady"

One day, while The Lady is in her pond, she is attacked by a red-tailed hawk. She barely gets away, while the hawk is chased from the yard by Gregory the watch-crow and his friends. When Whittington returns from a visit to a lady cat down the road, he discovers The Lady shocked and traumatized, offering to protect her while she goes out into the yard and eats. The other animals stand guard as well, leading The Lady to express her gratitude to them for being her family.

"Ben Goes to Reading Recovery and Meets Miss O'Brian"

One day, just before Easter, Principal Parker takes Ben for his visit to Reading Recovery. There, Ben watches a boy taught by a teacher named Miss O'Brian, and is happy to realize both that someone else has his problem, and that there is someone to help. Later, Miss O'Brian introduces herself, saying the kids call her Coach O. She asks Ben to show her some of his reading and writing, and afterwards tells him she thinks she knows how to help. He says thank you and leaves.

Section 8, Chapters 27, 28, 29 and 30 Analysis

The book's thematic emphasis on interrelationship, friendship and trust manifests itself in several ways in this section. These include the compassion for Willy and Brahms shown first by Al and then by Bernie, the kids and the other animals, the care shown by Whittington and the other animals for the lady, and the care shown by Coach O to her students. Meanwhile, in the second narrative line (Dick's story), the cat's wounds serve as a trigger for Dick's compassion which manifests itself in the following section.

Other important elements in this section include Whittington's reference to the lady cat up the road (a visit that results in the eventual appearance of a pair of kittens in Chapter 39) and the two references to violence (the attacks of the rats on the cat and of the hawk on The Lady). The sense here, particularly in the hawk attack, is that random violence is as much a part of animal life, and perhaps metaphorically of life in general, as is the compassionate interaction that characterizes so many of the other animal relationships in the work; suffering seems, in fact, to be the trigger for such interaction.

Section 9, Chapters 31, 32, 33 and 34

Section 9, Chapters 31, 32, 33 and 34 Summary

"The Cat's Operation"

As Ben's reading lessons continue, Whittington describes how Dick arranged for his cat to be treated by a surgeon who repaired the tendon torn in the cat's fight with the rats. During the surgery, Dick made an important discovery about the cat's paws that linked the cat with the revered cats of the past (see "Quotes", p. 131). At that, Whittington stretches out his own paws, and shows that he has the same link.

"Dick Meets Will Price Again"

One day, Whittington says, continuing his story, Dick was visited by Will Price, the man who drove him to London and who, he told Dick, had been working for Sir Louis since he was ten. He said that Dick was to join The Unicorn on its next voyage; to help him get ready, Sir Louis sent him a book - the story of Marco Polo, a tradesman and merchant who sailed to the Far East. Dick, Whittington says, became excited and eager to follow in Polo's footsteps.

"Willy the Goat's Surprise"

Later that spring, everyone is taken by surprise when Willy the goat gives birth to a male goat that Abby names Theo after a boy at school. Willy, meanwhile, is renamed Wilhelmina. When The Lady and, surprisingly, Havey, see that Wilhelmina is not a great mother, they take over the main responsibilities of raising the youngster (see "Quotes", p. 142).

"Dick Sees the Girl in Black Again"

Arriving in the barn early one day, Ben confesses that he's been sent home for hitting a boy who made fun of his reading. He also says that Dr. Parker has told him that his classes with Coach O are to continue all summer, and that he doesn't want to take them because everyone would know and make fun of him. The animals try to convince him to take the chance, Whittington pointing out that the boy he loved never got such an opportunity. Ben isn't convinced and seems to be getting angry, so Whittington goes back to Dick's story. Dick, he says, went with the cat to Sir Louis' to make plans for the sailing expedition. As soon as they arrived, however, the cat raced off. Dick went after her, encountering Sir Louis' granddaughter, who took him to where the cat was hiding. There, with the cat watching, the girl revealed her name (Mary Green) and, in spite of Dick's urgent request, said she'd never be able to see him again. Dick rejoined the meeting, unable to get thoughts of Mary out of his mind even while Sir Louis and the other men were describing the wealth and adventures that awaited him on his journey (see "Quotes", p. 149).

Section 9, Chapters 31, 32, 33 and 34 Analysis

The first point to note relates to the events of Chapter 31, specifically the suggestion that Whittington is not only related to Dick's cat, but also through her is related to the ancient wisdom of the cats of the past. Here, there is a reiteration of the idea that the wisdom of cats transcends human ideas of time, extending both into the past, as indicated by the paws, and into the future, as indicated by the apparent awareness of, and trust in, the future, as manifest in Dick's cat. This sense of trust — that events are unfolding as they are meant to — manifests itself not only in the cat's relationship with Mary, which seems intended to reassure Dick that HIS relationship with Mary is meant to be, but also in the encounter between Dick and Will Price. This is another of those previously discussed coincidences that seems, upon further consideration, to be a component of the work's thematic contention that all is as it is meant to be — even Dick's frustrating inability to develop a relationship with Mary, perhaps even the "male" goat giving birth, which leads to the grudging friendship between The Lady and Havey. This latter, in turn, can be seen as another development in the work's narrative and thematic emphasis on the necessity for, and value of, interdependence, even among those who don't seem to be good candidates to relate to each other in that way, an idea reiterated again through the "character" of Havey in Chapter 35.

Section 10, Chapters 35, 36, 37 and 38

Section 10, Chapters 35, 36, 37 and 38 Summary

"Marker Raids the Barn"

The frustrated dog from the farm up the hill, Marker, breaks free of his leash and rushes down into the barn, where he attacks Coraggio. Wilhelmina and Whittington chase him off, but Coraggio seems seriously wounded. Bernie is convinced that he's dead, but Havey noses him gently and he starts moving. Bernie puts him in with Blackie and soon he is able to stand and move again. From then on, narration comments, Havey gave him a lick every time she came to the barn, and Bernie remains convinced that she helped him back to life.

"Dick Decides on the Dangerous Voyage"

Whittington tells how, as Dick worried about losing Mary, the cat climbed into his lap and tried to reassure him, but for the first time he was unable to understand what she had to say. As the weeks passed and as preparations for the voyage continued, Dick doubted whether he should go. One day, Whittington says, Dick became so obsessed with Mary that he set off for the house in the country where she had been placed. The cat tried to follow, but with her wounded leg, she couldn't keep up. As he walked, Dick heard the sound of the bells, which seemed to say to him, "Turn around, Dick Whittington." Only when he heard the sound of the iron bell that sounded like the bell from home, its toll saying "Back, back," did he stop, retrace his steps, collect the cat, and return home.

"Ben's Decision"

Ben's teacher tells Marion that she doesn't think Ben should move on with his class because his reading simply isn't good enough. The next day, Ben tells Abby and the barn animals that Coach O has said if he can get through a particular series of books by the end of the summer, he can move on. It will take his entire vacation, but he's going to do it. Abby and the animals cheer, The Lady saying, "You're taking charge of yourself like Dick Whittington."

"A Token for Mary"

Whittington describes how, just before Dick left on his journey, he was given a gift by Sir Louis - the book about Marco Polo. Fitzwarren, meanwhile, gave him a quest - to find and bring back then-exotic plants like rhubarb and lilac. After a journey during which Dick's pining for Mary eventually gave way to calm work, Dick and The Unicorn arrived at their destination - Palermo, in Sicily. While Dick was engaged in his trading mission, Will fell ill with malaria and made it clear he wanted to die not in Sicily, but at home. Dick arranged for The Unicorn to return with him and its valuable cargo, now including lilac, but no rhubarb. As the final preparations were being made, his cat told him to prepare a token to be sent home for Mary with the message, "If you don't know me, you know

nobody." Dick was doubtful, but did as the cat said, and sent the token on The Unicorn, with a note to Fitzwarren that it was to be delivered with no hint of who it was from.

Section 10, Chapters 35, 36, 37 and 38 Analysis

Like the attack of the red tailed hawk on The Lady, the attack of Marker the dog can be seen as a metaphoric representation of how nature can be unpredictable and violent as well as nurturing, with the violence again, as it did with the attack on The Lady, triggering compassion and interdependence. What's particularly interesting, though, is how Havey, who earlier in the narrative had herself been regarded / portrayed as a source of such violence, proves here to be a source of compassion. This reinforces the suggestion first made when she started taking care of the baby goat in the previous section, that compassion, friendship and interdependence can, perhaps even will, manifest in unexpected ways (see "Topics for Discussion - What experiences do you have..."). Havey's actions also suggest, like the intuitive knowledge experienced and revealed by Dick's cat, that animals have a sensitivity to, and awareness of, the powers and abilities of nature that human beings don't (see "Topics for Discussion - Have you ever had an experience with an animal ...").

The awareness of and/or sensibility to the future shown by Dick's cat is connected to the story of the bells which, as previously discussed, is an important component of the Dick Whittington legend (see "Characters"). While not a frequently used symbol in the work, the bells are a clear manifestation of its suggestion that there is an experience of existence transcendent of both time and place, an experience of faith and/or fate that lies beneath both memory and hope, linking past and future with the present. The cat has it, the bells evoke it, and the story thematically suggests that human beings, like animals, should trust it in the way Dick and Ben both eventually learn to do. This link between the experiences of Dick and Ben is further underlined and/or emphasized by the comment made by The Lady at the end of the chapter, although it could be argued that they are not necessarily taking charge of themselves, but trusting the destiny that seems to be laid out for them.

Section 11, Chapters 39, 40, 41 and 42

Section 11, Chapters 39, 40, 41 and 42 Summary

"Gent Arrives"

A lost male duck arrives at the farm. He and The Lady immediately form a bond, and she introduces him to the rest of the barn family as Gent. Soon afterwards, Lady starts laying eggs, but is not interested in sitting with them. Ben moves them to Blackie's roost, where she happily sits with them and eventually hatches some ducklings. She, Brahms and Coraggio take care of them around the barn, then show them to the pond where The Lady teaches them to swim. Whittington feels a bit lost without the company of The Lady (see "Quotes", p. 164), but some time later the tabby he visited earlier (Chapter 29) brings down a pair of kittens that he fathered, and he begins taking care of them. Meanwhile, Ben's reading continues to improve, although occasionally he gets frustrated. After one eruption of anger, Coach O has him run some laps before his lessons to burn off his excess energy.

"A Rescue"

One night while the kittens are playing, one of them gets caught up in some string and starts choking. When most of the animals prove unable to help, The Lady calls the rats. The Old One hurries out, sees what's happening, chews through the string, and frees the kitten.

"Dick's Cat is Lost at Sea"

On the next phase of Dick's voyage, Whittington says, the ship encountered a storm that left it seriously damaged and Dick's cat missing, presumably swept overboard. He searched desperately for her, but never found her. She had, however, left behind two kittens, one of which, Whittington says, was his ancestor. Dick fed them milk from the two live goats on the ship. Eventually, the ship and its remaining crew made their way to Constantinople, where Dick set up the agency Sir Louis had asked him to establish. He also explored the city, making deals for spices and jewels and searching for rhubarb. He found none and attempted to put together an expedition to search further, but realized he couldn't put together enough money and eventually sailed back home. There he was met by Fitzwarren, who gave him important news - that Will Price died at sea, and that Mary's husband, a rich aristocrat chosen for her by her father, had also recently died, leaving all his money to the church. Fitzwarren also said he delivered Dick's token, and shortly afterwards, Sir Louis himself died (see "Quotes", p. 176).

"Mary"

The next day, Whittington says, Dick visited Mary. As they sat together in her father's garden, he told her stories of his voyages, and she told him the story of her life - how her parents died of plague when she was very little, and how she had been raised by Sir

Louis. She also told him of her joy at receiving his token via Sir William. Whittington then says that Dick and Mary got married, that Dick had a long and successful life but never again left England, that he became Lord Mayor of London, and that he accomplished all the things Sir Louis asked of him (see "Chapter 26" and "Quotes", p. 118). Whittington also says that for the rest of his days, Dick kept company with one descendent after another of the original cat (see "Quotes", p. 179).

Section 11, Chapters 39, 40, 41 and 42 Analysis

Barnyard history ironically repeats itself in the first chapter of this section, as The Lady repeats behavior first displayed by Wilhelmina the goat (i.e. neglecting offspring) and the other animals manifest the book's thematic emphasis on inter-dependence by taking care of those offspring in her stead. Meanwhile, the work's narrative and thematic contemplation of elements of life and animal experiences that transcend time continues with the juxtaposed references to the offspring of both Whittington and his ancestress, Dick's cat. The implication here is that not only are elements of their physical lives and skills being passed on (i.e. their skill at rat-catching), so too are their wisdom and skills at communicating with human beings. Meanwhile, the faith in the future practiced and preached by Dick's cat, the faith that everything will work out as it should, is dramatized through the inevitable union between Dick and Mary. It also appears in Dick's apparent fulfillment of what now seems like less of a general comment and more of a prophecy - specifically, the pronouncement made by Mary's father (see Chapter 26, and also "Quotes", p. 118). The fact that this pronouncement is made by a human being suggests that animals aren't the only beings who have the capacity to transcend the here and now and connect with both the past and the future. In fact, there is the sense here that the narrative is suggesting that humans should open themselves TO that sort of connection.

On a structural level, this section brings to a close the work's second narrative line - the story of Dick Whittington. The final section brings both its third narrative line (Ben's learning to read) and its first (the story of Whittington) to their climaxes and resolution.

Finally, the story of the rat's saving the kitten's life completes the circle of foreshadowing initiated in Chapter 13, where The Lady convinced Whittington to agree to a truce with the rats by saying he may need their help some day. With the near-strangling of the kitten, that day comes, that HELP comes, and once again animals exhibit the sort of instinct and valuing of the future that, the work seems to contend, humans should develop as well.

Section 12, Chapters 43, 44 and 45

Section 12, Chapters 43, 44 and 45 Summary

"Ben's Triumph"

When word reaches the animals in the barn that Ben is to be moved forward into the next grade, they all erupt into celebration. After a while, The Lady quiets them down, saying they all had "a hand, a wing, and a paw in this. It isn't just Ben, we've all passed!"

"Life in the Barn Continues"

One fall afternoon, a flock of ducks flies overhead. Gent and his children fly up to join them. The Lady tries to fly to them, but her clipped wings keep her grounded. For several days she is quiet and depressed, and the children and animals start to speak of her as though she's dying. One day, though, she rouses herself and tells them all, "Flying isn't everything. There's something to staying put where you're needed."

"The Last Warm Afternoon of Autumn"

In the fall, Whittington announces that he is taking his daughter, Mary Green, to find the boy that loved him. On "the last warm afternoon of autumn," Ben, Abby, The Lady and Whittington sit in front of the barn talking, and Ben comments on how it felt to learn to read (see "Quotes", p.185). They all go inside to see if the first word Ben learned, Psalm, is still on the stanchion. "It was."

Section 12, Chapters 43, 44 and 45 Analysis

In these final brief chapters, the climaxes of the work's thematic and narrative lines intersect. The narrative of Ben's learning to read resolves with a reiteration of the work's thematic consideration of the value of interdependence - he succeeded with the help of others. The value of interdependence is reiterated further in the vignette recounting Gent's departure and The Lady's recovery from her loss - with, as the song goes, a little help from her friends. An intriguing side theme emerges in her comment on the value of staying put, a lesson that seems to have been learned by Dick who, as previously revealed, never left England after marrying Mary, but not by Whittington, who chooses another destiny - reuniting with the boy who loved him and passing on his family's ancient wisdom. The suggestion here is that connection with that wisdom, that sense of transcendence of time and place, is even more important than, as The Lady says, staying where one is needed. It's interesting to note, though, the juxtaposition between Whittington's decision and the reference to the Psalms - a book of the Bible that, partly because it's IN the Bible and partly because its subject matter is what it is, is often viewed as ITSELF transcendent of time and place. In other words, the book's final moments give the sense that the work as a whole, through all its narrative and thematic

lines, is itself a psalm of transcendence, a kind of poem to the ways of the spirit which is, in the view of many commentators over the centuries, what the Psalms ultimately are.

Characters

Whittington

Whittington the cat is both the central character of the novel's main plot line and the narrator of its secondary narrative line (subplot). When he first appears, he is lonely and physically unsteady, his physical and emotional states of being mirroring each other. Over the course of the narrative, however, as he develops and builds friendships (particularly with The Lady - see below), both his lameness and his loneliness disappear, his physical and emotional states of being again mirroring each other. This aspect of Whittington's story is an important manifestation of one of the work's central themes, its consideration of the value and rewards of friendship (see "Themes"). It's interesting, meanwhile, to note that this need and capacity for friendship and loyalty (particularly when it comes to Whittington's feelings towards the boy who loved him) are, in some ways, at odds with some of the characteristics widely attributed to cats as a species - specifically, their tendency towards independence and their reputed (often apparent) disdain for others. Whittington, like his reputed ancestor, displays a remarkable sense of loyalty for a cat, and an unusual capacity for compassion. Here again, he manifests both the work's thematic consideration of friendship and its parallel consideration of the value of such loyalty and compassion. The narrative seems to be suggesting that if a cat can experience those feelings and grow from those experiences, a cat being among the most self-sufficient of animals, then there's value for humans, who BELIEVE themselves to be self-sufficient, to learn and grow from those feelings as well.

Whittington's Boy

When he first appears, Whittington tells The Lady that he once belonged to a boy and that the two cared about each other very much, but were separated by circumstances. Several times throughout the narrative, the narrative and Whittington himself refer to the latter's lingering feelings of affection and longing for the unnamed boy, both affection and longing eventually driving him to leave the barn and the family that he has found there to go in search of the boy. The relationship between Whittington and the boy is another example of how friendship and its motivating power are thematically explored throughout the book.

Bernie, Marion

Bernie is the farmer who owns the land and the barn where Whittington and the other animal characters take refuge. He and his wife Marion embody one of the book's key themes, the value and necessity of compassion, by rescuing and caring for those, both animals and people, who are in some way debilitated or troubled.

Abby, Ben

Abby and Ben are Bernie and Marion's two grandchildren, who live with their grandparents following their mother's death and the disappearance of their father. Over the course of the narrative, both children exhibit emotional difficulties as the result of being in this upsetting situation, but the narrative is primarily concerned with how those difficulties manifest in Ben, who has problems reading. Ben's struggle to read anchors the book's third narrative line (subplot), a struggle that, in both situation and thematic relevance, parallels both those of Whittington and Dick (see "Topics for Discussion - In what ways ...").

The Lady, Gent

The Lady is a duck, and the primary authority figure in the barn where Whittington comes to make his home. For the most part she is calm and rational, clever and wise, a leader without being bossy or dictatorial. Her wings are clipped, which means she is unable to fly, but for the most part she is content with her life. She loses a bit of control over herself when she finds herself involved with an attractive male duck (Gent) who briefly makes his home in the barn and, when he responds to the call of his nature and takes off with their children, becomes depressed. Then, however, in an evocation of the novel's thematic focus on friendship, The Lady realizes that her friends in the barn mean just as much to her, if not more, than her relationship with Gent, and resumes her old life.

Coraggio, Blackie, Brahms

These three characters are the named chickens making their homes in the barn. There are several other chickens, the bantams, but they are given no individual identities. Coraggio's name means courage, and he is portrayed as having a glorious singing (i.e. crowing) voice. That voice is taken from him after he is attacked by a neighboring dog, and he almost loses his life as well. But care and attention from an unexpected source (Havey the barn dog), plus the support of the other barn animals, brings him back to life. Blackie and Brahms, meanwhile, are two other chickens who come into the barn family at different times in the narrative. Blackie helps in the raising of The Lady's children when she (The Lady) becomes too involved with Gent to pay attention to them. Brahms is notable primarily for his name, given to him by Abby after a misunderstanding and which he shares with a great classical composer.

Aramis, Li'l Spooker

These characters are the horses adopted by Bernie after they become too old to race and are essentially abandoned. Spooker is the more successful winner of races, a fact that Aramis resents but has learned to live with. Both horses become ill, with different ailments, over the course of the narrative, but both recover fully with the help of Bernie,

the other animals, and the veterinarian. In the experiences of the two horses, the book once again makes a comment on the necessity and value of compassion and interdependence.

The Old One, the Rats

The rats, and their leader The Old One, are initially portrayed as a threat to the well being and happiness of those in the barn, taking the eggs and young of the chickens, stealing food, and generally being pests. Over the course of the narrative, however, they develop positive relationships with the other animals with each side of their mutual conflict developing respect and compassion for the other. Here again, the book explores the themes of friendship and interdependence.

Wilhelmina, Theo

Wilhelmina, a goat, is another animal adopted by Bernie. She is originally believed to be male, and is named William. When she gives birth to a male goat named Theo, everyone is surprised. Wilhelmina turns out to be a somewhat neglectful mother, and taking care of Theo falls to Havey and The Lady, a circumstance that again manifests the book's thematic consideration of the value of friendship and interdependence.

Havey, Marker

These characters are two dogs that, at least in their initial appearances, are both angry and violent. Havey is a sometime companion of Bernie's, who makes her home primarily at the gas station where he works but occasionally accompanies him to the barn to visit the other animals. Her frequent violent attacks on The Lady, emerging from frustration and loneliness, are halted by the intervention of Whittington, acting out of respect for his new friend (The Lady). Eventually, Havey becomes a welcome and indispensable member of the barn family, taking care of Theo and helping Coraggio back to life and health. Her story manifests the book's thematic concern with friendship by illustrating how a negative attitude can be transformed by its active presence (i.e. Whittington acting out of friendship for The Lady) and even how physical suffering (i.e. Coraggio's wounds) can be healed by compassion. Marker, unlike Havey, is just plain mean, and one day attacks the animals in the barn for no reason whatsoever. It's Marker who causes the life-threatening and voice-destroying injuries to Coraggio. He heightens the value and depth of Havey's transformation through contrast; in other words, he shows how significant her movement towards compassion is by acting entirely WITHOUT compassion.

Dick Whittington and his Cat

The story of Dick Whittington and his miraculous cat has been a popular fable in the culture and history of Great Britain for centuries. The story is based partly in fact. There

was indeed a Lord Mayor of London named Richard Whittington who did all the things that Dick Whittington is said, at the end of the work, to have done. There is, however, no record that Richard Whittington had the sort of relationship with a cat that Dick Whittington had, and no record whatsoever that said cat accomplished what Dick's cat is said to have done. An author's afterword to Whittington suggests that the story of Richard Whittington was, in the years after his political reign in London, blended with the mythic Eastern tale of a remarkable psychic cat who could communicate with its masters and could foretell the future. Whatever the sources of the tale, the story is ultimately a fable or parable, illustrating the value of human characteristics (loyalty, compassion, trust) by portraying those characteristics in animals and their relationships.

Will Price, the Land Agent, Hugh Fitzwarren, Sir Louis Green

These characters all appear in the story, told by Whittington, of Dick Whittington and his cat. Will Price is the coachman who compassionately helps Dick realize his dream of getting to London in spite of the resistance of the Land Agent. Hugh Fitzwarren is the merchant who takes Dick into his home and business, giving him a new life and the opportunity to prosper. Sir Louis Green is the mysterious, wealthy, wise old man who sells Dick his cat (although there is some question later as to whether the cat is actually Sir Louis' to sell) and later proves to be a guide and mentor to Dick. Mary Green is Sir Louis' daughter, beautiful and mysterious. Dick falls in love with her the moment he sees her, but is prevented by circumstances from marrying her until later in life and the man chosen for her has died. The Arab King is one of the leaders with whom Dick is sent by Fitzwarren and Green to trade. His palace is plagued with rats, and when he realizes how valuable a rat hunter Dick's cat is, he offers Dick increasing riches to part with her. Some years later, he eventually lets the cat go, after she has proved her usefulness and left several descendents behind to continue the work of clearing rats from the palace.

Marco Polo

The stories of real-life explorer and trader Marco Polo, who opened the Far East to trade with Europe, provide inspiration for both Dick Whittington and those who fund and support his journeys (Sir Louis Green, Hugh Fitzwarren).

Dr. Donald Parker, Miss O'Brian, Keith

These characters all become involved in Ben's struggle to learn to read. Dr. Parker is the principal of Ben's school, who insists that he take extra classes to catch up on his reading. Miss O'Brian, referred to as Coach O, is the remedial reading teacher who forcefully helps Ben overcome his reading challenges. Both characters manifest the work's thematically central consideration of compassion. Keith is one of Coach O's other students, a boy similar in age to Ben with similar difficulties. Seeing Keith improve triggers Ben to realize that Coach O may be able to help him, and to accept that help.

Objects/Places

The Barn

The barn becomes home, at least for a while, to the wandering Whittington. It is there that he, and the reader, learn the value of friendship and compassion through the animals who make their home and their lives there as the result of the compassion shown to them by Bernie, the farmer. He rescues them from otherwise lonely existences that might otherwise have been shorter lived.

The Texaco Station

This is the gas station where Bernie works, and where Havey is kept during the day.

The Pond

This is the spot near the barn where The Lady swims, where she meets Gent, and where she spends most of her time with him even after their children are born.

The Fable of the Lion and the Rat

The Lady refers to this famous story, most notably recounted in Aesop's Fables, when discussing why Whittington and the other barn animals should enter into a truce with the rats. In the fable, a Lion traps a Rat and is about to kill and eat it, but the Rat pleads for his freedom, saying that one day, the Lion may need his help. The powerful and arrogant Lion doubts that that day will ever come, but lets the Rat go anyway. One day, however, the Lion is trapped in a net, and is only freed with the help of the Rat chewing through the ropes that make up the net. The events of this fable are enacted later in the narrative when the life of one of Whittington's children is saved by the leader of the rats chewing through the rope strangling her.

The Registered Letter, Reading Recovery

This is the letter written by Dr. Parker to Bernie and Marion informing them of how serious Ben's troubles with reading actually are. It triggers the family's decision to get Ben into Reading Recovery, a school program that helps students like Ben who have trouble with their reading.

The Bible and the Psalms

In both the main narrative and the story of Dick Whittington, the Bible and the Psalms are the means by which characters learn to read, Ben in the main narrative and Dick in the story told by Whittington. The Psalms is a book in the Old Testament of the Bible that essentially amounts to a collection of poems written in praise of God. They are particularly important in Ben's story, in that the word is one of the first that he memorizes and which, as previously discussed (see Section 5, Analysis), provides a potential link between the book and a certain Christian sensibility.

London

In the story of Dick Whittington, the city of London is a symbol of prosperity and hope. Dick longs to get to London in order to live the kind of life of which he dreams, and while his first experiences there are troubling, he eventually both realizes his own prosperity and, when he becomes Lord Mayor, enables others to realize that prosperity as well.

The London Bells

The sound of the various bells that ring throughout the city of London is an essential component of the story of Dick Whittington, speaking and singing to him of prosperity. At the same time, however, and as the story suggests, there is one particular bell with an earthy, solemn sound unlike that of the other bells. This bell reminds him of the impoverished home and life Dick left behind, and at key moments of his life, reminds him to remain true to himself and to his purpose.

The Docks

London was, and is, an essential center for the industry and trade of shipping. Dick made his fortune and reputation working in this busy, excitable mini-community, at first through his employment with merchant Hugh Fitzwarren, but later in his own right.

The Unicorn

This is the ship that took Dick on his two trading missions to the Far East, and which brought him home when those missions were complete. He eventually discovered that it was owned by the wealthy aristocrat who became one of his benefactors, Sir Louis Green.

The Palace in Tripoli

On Dick's first trading mission, he was sent to negotiate trade with an Arab king who had a palace in Tripoli, now the capital of Libya. The palace was overrun with rats, but

Dick's cat quickly showed what a good hunter she was and was basically purchased by the king to help eliminate the rats completely.

Themes

Courage Overcomes Difficulties

This is arguably the book's primary theme, manifesting as it does in several ways in each of the work's main narrative lines, or plots. First there is the Whittington plot, in which Whittington the cat comes to live in the barn and develops friendships there. The value of courage in overcoming difficulties is evident right from the first moments of this plot, in which Whittington, who has difficulty walking, convinces the other members of the barn family, who have difficulty with the idea of welcoming another predator into their little community, to let him move into their home. Whittington's problems with walking are themselves overcome when he courageously helps The Lady fight off the repeated attacks of Havey the dog.

This theme also manifests itself in the book's second narrative line, the story of Dick Whittington as told by Whittington the cat. The character of Dick faces difficulty after difficulty, but surmounts them with consistent expressions and/or manifestations of both courage and commitment. Finally, there is the Ben plot, in which young Ben struggles to learn to read. The courage he both discovers and applies here manifests on two levels - his courage in confronting the problem, and his courage in confronting those who tease and/or mock him for HAVING the problem. In all three plots, and in incidents that occur within each of them, the courage of the characters overcomes the various sorts of difficulties that they face. Consideration of one particular source of that courage defines the second of the book's primary themes, its consideration of compassion and interdependence.

Interdependence and Compassion

On each level of the book's exploration of the relationship between courage and difficulty, individual courage is, in turn, reinforced and strengthened by the characters' experience of the compassion of others, and the interdependence that results from that compassion. The animals in the barn all come into their new home as the result of Bernie's compassion, creating and strengthening their life together through realizing that life can be bettered if they have compassion for each other and work together, supporting each other through interdependence. In other words, through caring they develop trust, and as the result of that development, they care more deeply, become more compassionate, and become even more interdependent. Life becomes better when Whittington and the other animals in the barn come to respect the value of the rats and vice versa. They all develop at least a degree of compassion for each other, and as a result open themselves to the benefits of working together (interdependence). Life becomes better when Dick comes to trust and care for the wisdom offered by his cat. They come to trust each other and care for each other, and therefore become interdependent. Life becomes better for Fitzwarren and Dick both when they realize the value of what they have to offer and how they can both benefit by working together and

respecting each other. Life becomes better for Ben when he realizes that Abby, his grandparents, the other animals, and eventually Miss O'Brian are all doing what they're doing because they care for him, they have compassion for his situation. He comes to trust and justifiably rely on them for their help, support and guidance. In all these circumstances, in all these relationships, ultimately what is coming into being is summed up in the work's third primary thematic consideration - its contemplation of the nature and value of friendship.

Friendship

This theme manifests itself in several ways throughout the novel, primarily in relationship to its other primary themes. Several times over the course of the work's three layered stories or plot lines (the Whittington plot, the Dick plot, the Ben plot), friendships that develop between the various characters change their lives for the better - helping them find the courage to face difficulties and teaching them compassion and the value of interdependence. For example, and as previously discussed (see "Characters - Whittington"), the physical improvement Whittington experiences as the result of acting on his friendship with, and regard for, The Lady ends the lameness in his leg at the same time as the threat posed by Havey and faced by The Lady comes to an end. The implication here is that friendship is healing and healthy (i.e. for Whittington), increases safety (for The Lady) and, perhaps indirectly, triggers Havey to realize the value of offering friendship as she does for both Theo and Coraggio. The story of Dick Whittington and his cat is one of the most enduring and powerful stories / fables of friendship in the history of literature and/or of folklore. The story of Ben's struggle to read is defined, at least in part, by the friendship and support offered by both animals and humans, as The Lady herself points out in the narrative's final moments. In short, supportive friendships are everywhere in this book, and present positive models of what is possible when, and if, friendship is there to offer support. For further consideration of this particular theme, see "Topics for Discussion - In what ways does friendship..."

Style

Point of View

The book's narrative point of view shifts several times as the result of what might be described as the story within the story - specifically, Whittington's recounting the tale of Dick Whittington and his cat. Essentially, there are two points of view corresponding with the book's two main narrative lines. The first point of view / narrative line is third person, past tense, the story unfolding from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who sees and describes the circumstances, both inner and outer, of all the characters. It's true that the central character here is Whittington, but the experiences and circumstances of several other characters are explored with similar, if not actually equal, amounts of depth and attention. This is particularly true of The Lady and Ben, somewhat true of Bernie, slightly true of Abby and Marion, and glancingly true of several minor characters (Coach O, the Old One). The second point of view / narrative line is also third person, past tense, but unfolds from the perspective of a more limited, more objective narrator, Whittington, who tells his story focusing on the experiences and circumstances, again both inner and outer, of only one character ... Dick Whittington, the man from whom he takes his name. The experiences and circumstances of other characters, particularly Fitzwarren, Sir Louis Green, and of course the cat, are also considered and described, but not with the same degree of attention/focus/depth as, for example, Ben and The Lady in the primary narrative line. This shifting point of view adds a sense of depth to the work, and therefore increases the potential of reader interest in, and engagement with, the narrative.

Setting

There is a certain sense of timelessness about the book's setting, and indeed of placelessness. While certain details suggest the book's placement in relatively contemporary America (any time from the 1930's to the present day), these details (Bernie's gas station being named a Texaco, the existence of a Reading Recovery program) are ultimately less important to the story than the values and themes the story explores. In other words, the story and the understandings with which it wants the reader to come away are essentially transcendent of time and/or of place - although it could be argued that, in this contemporary age of highly electronic friendships, the book's emphasis on person to person contact, particularly through storytelling, is especially relevant.

Within that sense of timelessness and/or placelessness, the book's two primary narratives play out in two primary settings. In the case of the Whittington plot, and the Ben plot that plays out within THAT plot, the primary setting is the barn. This is a place in which the animals who live there not only make the best of what amounts to a sort of enforced community (animals housed together), but also discover the deeper benefits of friendship, interdependence, and trust. Ultimately, they have no choice BUT to trust

each other, learning to endow and enrich that trust with the compassion shown to them by Bernie. In the case of the Dick story, the primary setting is London, a place where Dick initially believes his dreams of prosperity are impossible to achieve, but where he eventually realizes, through hard work and commitment and respect, that prosperity is indeed possible. In the case of the former, the setting provides a place of safety despite the occasional incursions of angry dogs, while the latter is a place of challenge and obstacle that eventually becomes a place of safety.

Language and Meaning

The language used by the author in constructing and defining the narrative is generally quite accessible and easily understood. There are occasional glimpses of more poetic imagery, words and phrases that suggest a broader and deeper emotional or spiritual sensibility without being too overt and/or overly emphatic. In other words, the language of the piece is straightforward but evocative, leaving plenty of room for readers to engage with the story on a personal level. The language used to portray the familiar but idiosyncratic characters helps with this, with traits, realizations and actions alike described with vivid, but understated, economy.

This sense of evocativeness, of hinting at and / or revealing meaning through action and / or implication as opposed to direct statement also applies to the piece's meaning, its suggestion of theme rather than overt statement. Specifically, ideas of relationship between the three narrative lines (the story of Whittington, within which unfolds Ben's story and within which is told Dick's story) are left for the reader to perceive and develop, although there are some points in which such relationships are hinted at quite directly. One example of this is The Lady's comment at the end of Chapter 37, in which she comes right out and says that what Ben is choosing to do is the same thing as Dick Whittington chose to do. For the most part, however, while there is the clear sense that the author intends to suggest that parallels are present, defining what those parallels are and how they relate to one another is left to the reader.

Structure

As discussed throughout this analysis, three narrative lines, or plots, unfold and develop over the length of the book, both their structure and their themes echoing and reinforcing each other. The first, or main, plot is the story of Whittington the cat. This narrative line begins the book, ends the book, and while it has events or key moments of its own, also serves as the glue or linking material that binds the other two plot lines together. The second line is the story of the boy/man from whom Whittington took his name, the fabled Dick Whittington. The telling of Dick's story begins some time after the first plot has been established. The third narrative line or plot is the story of Ben's struggles learning to read, foreshadowed by events in the first two plots but beginning in earnest only after the first two have been established.

Aside from the way the three plot lines interact thematically, it's important to note that they also interact structurally, with key events and circumstances in one echoing and/or mirroring events and/or circumstances in the other. In other words, when Ben faces a particular situation in his struggle to read, the author has structured the other two plot lines so that the main characters in THOSE plots (Whittington and Dick) face similar situations and or challenges. All three main characters in all three plots also face similar situations of support and/or encouragement at similar times. Here, structure can be seen as manifesting one of the book's key themes, the idea of interdependence. This is not so much interdependence between individuals as interdependence between EXPERIENCES. In other words, the novel uses structure, character and theme to portray how someone, cat or human or schoolboy, can learn and/or grow from the experience of someone else ... from the offer of a sort of friendship, if you like, from characters in other stories. And isn't that, ultimately, what stories are FOR?

Quotes

"'The senior barn rat is one-eyed now from the pecking he got when they ganged up on the gray rooster. I'd have said that rooster was a dandy and a coward, but when you're fighting for your life you'll risk everything.'" Chapter 1, The Lady, p. 5

"'I want to be part of the talking. If I'd snick in, the chickens would have been afraid and maybe you too. I didn't want that. I want friends.'" Ibid, Whittington, p. 6

"It was a curious thing, The Lady's authority ... what gave her power was how steady she was. She never rushed; she was always sure, she took responsibility ... presence of mind counts for a lot in this world." Chapter 2, p. 9

"Sometimes when the kids doled out the sticky grain with molasses and vitamins, the horses would nuzzle and lick them, probably for salt but maybe for love ... sometimes if Bernie was standing close by, they'd nuzzle him too ... he pushed them off, but it made him smile. His years fell away when he smiled. You could see the boy he'd been." Chapter 4, p. 16

"Bernie had a reputation. You could tell from his smile and the way he walked he was likelier to say yes than no to a crate of tired chickens." Chapter 5, p. 19 (1)

"The barn hummed with talk about the cat. Not the moving-in part, they couldn't stop him from doing that. The family part. You can't get rid of somebody once he's part of your family. Whatever happens, you're responsible. But who could say who belonged in or out of that family?" Chapter 5, p. 19 (2).

"'History records the names of men because men write it. Dick Whittington's name survives but his cat's name is lost. That's what's wrong with history. If it hadn't been for his cat, no one would remember Dick. Now no-one remembers his cat.'" Chapter 9, Whittington, p. 35

"London was a town of ocean fogs coming in with the smells of the river ... bells sounded the hours, calls to worship, alarms, laments for the dead ... most of the London bells had more silver in them than the bell in his grandmother's church at home ... the few times [Dick] heard one in London that sounded like it he'd see his grandmother's face and his knees would go weak with homesickness ..." Chapter 15, p. 70

"Out of five black marks that had their origins a thousand generations back in a place lost to memory, Ben conjured up sounds that made a word that in turn evoked the presence of something that wasn't there. He got the picture of 'psalm' and how it should sound, and he locked it away forever." Chapter 16, p. 72

"'Most animals won't lock eyes with men. Goats do, and snakes, which is why we associate them with evil. The rest of us look away in shame or embarrassment when someone looks us in the eye. But this was different, this was a stare of recognition, the

way you can't take your eyes off someone you're eager to see: you want to embrace them with your eyes.'" Chapter 18, Whittington, p. 78

"[Dick] had the same lost feeling he'd had when he heard the harsh, dry bell of home. It felt wrong to let the cat go, even though she'd given him a signal ... if the boy cried, no one saw. He left with the captain for London. He knew there wasn't going to be another cat." Chapter 22, p. 102

"Ben's despair frightened his grandparents. It wasn't a boy's rage. It wasn't anger. All feelings he'd built up about his mother's death, his father's being off somewhere and not caring, his inability to keep up with his classmates, gave way at once." Chapter 23, p. 104

"Ben ... could hear what they'd whisper if he walked out to go to Reading Recovery. Marion slid her chair over and put her arm around him. Only the two of them knew how hard she squeezed. In important family meetings like this Bernie did the talking. Marion spoke in her own way." Chapter 25, p. 110

"'You'll have time enough to give to them as needs. Give them books to learn from, comfort for the sick and old, and bring them water. Clean water, lad.'" Chapter 26, Sir Louis, p. 118.

"'While his cat was tied down for the operation, Dick noticed that her rear paws were dark purple, almost black. The sacred cats of Egypt had dark purple paws. They were of a rare breed, gods possessed of special powers as protectors of women and guardians of joy. If a house or temple caught fire, the most important thing was saving the cat.'" Chapter 31, Whittington, p. 136

"Havey remembered her pups and The Lady thought about children too. The presence of a not-quite-helpless youngster touched their maternal instincts. They took over Theo like two old aunts who had feuded in the past but at last agreed on one big thing. Whittington had ended Havey's attacks on The Lady. Theo made them allies." Chapter 33, p. 142

"'Dick ate nothing. He couldn't swallow. His eyes were like lions for that girl. He took in her face, the shade of her cheeks, the graceful way she moved with not a motion wasted. He could just make out her body, young and firm, the body of a girl who walked miles and rode her own horse.'" Chapter 35, Whittington, p. 149

"Whittington didn't have a best friend any more. He felt like Dick's cat after her master fell in love with the girl in black. The cat still slept beside The Lady by the barn door, but her conversation was all about Gent and life on the pond." Chapter 39, p. 164

"'They said he was in his ninety third year. He'd named me one of his pallbearers. I didn't know he esteemed me so as a friend. It's a hard thing to learn you were treasured by someone you admired only after he's cold.' Fitzwarren shook his head and looked away." Chapter 41, p. 176

"'He is not remembered because he died rich. He is remembered because he gave away everything. And everything he had to give away he owed to his cat. That's as much as I know,' said Whittington. 'I got the story from my mother, who got it from her mother - up the chain, mother to daughter, mother to daughter, all the way back to Dick Whittington's cat.'" Chapter 42, Whittington, p. 179

"'It was like coming in out of the dark,' he said. 'When I started, it was dark, there were shapes and things but nothing was clear, Then it was clear and I could see. It was like being born.'" Chapter 45, Ben, p. 185

Topics for Discussion

List and discuss the ways in which Whittington's journey through the narrative parallels that of Dick, in terms of its events, its circumstances, its relationships, and its themes.

In what ways do the stories of the other characters (The Lady, the other animals in the barn, Ben, Abby) reflect the themes and events of Dick's story, including the adventures and sufferings of his cat?

What experiences do you have that echo those of the characters who experienced compassion at the hands of Havey? In other words, have you ever encountered a bully or someone you thought was violent or mean that actually behaved with unexpected compassion?

Have you ever had an experience with an animal that seemed to suggest they had access to, and/or a connection with, a more spiritual and/or natural knowledge or sensibility than human beings do?

In what ways, other than those already discussed in this analysis, does friendship prove healing and healthy in the narrative? Which characters are changed for the better as the result of establishing and developing friendships? What specific changes emerge in individuals and their lives as the result of friendship?

In what ways does interdependence show up in your life? Who relies on you for things, and who do you rely on?

Describe some experiences where you've had to call on your resources of courage and/or friendship to deal with a difficult situation. Have you ever been bullied like Ben? Have you ever been hurt by abandonment in a relationship like The Lady? Have you ever been lonely like Whittington? Have you ever been desperate for a better life like Dick? In what ways have courage and/or friendship helped you out of those situations?

In what ways, do you think, might the quote from Ben reflect not only the book's consideration of friendship, but also the book's considerations of interdependence, compassion, and courage overcoming difficulties?