

# **The Wind in the Willows Study Guide**

## **The Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame**

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## Plot Summary

"The Wind in the Willows" is a young adult novel by Kenneth Graham which follows the adventures of the anthropomorphic animals Mole, Rat, Badger, Toad, and their friends. When the novel begins, Mole is at home doing spring cleaning, and he is quite bored with it. He casts down his cleaning instruments and runs to the surface to plow through rabbits along the roads and through grasses in the meadows to the river. It is at the river that Mole meets Rat, and the two form an immediate friendship. This friendship brings Rat's friends Badger, Otter, and Toad into the story.

The novel continues to follow the animals on their adventures and misadventures. Toad, a well-to-do heir, goes through innumerable fads such as his interest in motor-cars. However, when he steals a car, it is his undoing, He is arrested and sentenced to jail. He escapes from jail disguised as a washer-woman. Meanwhile, the other animals must deal with the bad reputations they have for being Toad's friend. Toad's home is taken over by menacing animals from the Wild Woods, and the four friends rally together to save the house. With the Wild Wooders driven away, Toad turns over a new leaf and becomes a respectable aristocrat. He is loved and admired by many. He deepens his friendship with Mole, Rat, and Badger; and, the four often take long walks and live well thereafter.



# Chapter 1-3

## Summary

### Chapter 1

Mole is spring cleaning his home deep underground, when he suddenly becomes bored of his chores and takes off. He heads to the surface and finds himself in the middle of a beautiful sunny day. He passes by rabbits who attempt to stop him to pay a toll for a private road. Mole ultimately comes upon a river bank, where he sits down. There, he meets Water Rat. Rat offers Mole a ride in his boat, which Mole accepts, for he has never before been in a boat. Rat can hardly believe this. Mole asks about Rat's life on the river, wondering if Rat gets lonely, but Rat says he does not, for the bank is very crowded with animals and birds.

As they converse, Mole looks over toward a patch of woods, which Rat explains is the Wild Woods. Rat goes on to say that river-bankers don't go there often. Among the residents of the Wild Wood is the Badger. The Mole asks about what is beyond the Wild Wood, and the Rat explains that the Wide World is beyond the Wild Wood and that nobody in his right mind would go there. He himself will not go there. They continue down the river, until they come to a dam, where they decide they will have a picnic lunch. From the water emerges Otter, a friend of Rat's, who joins the picnic.

As Otter joins the picnic, Badger comes along; but, since he is very antisocial, he turns around and goes home. Otter says that Toad is out in his boat, and Rat explains that Toad goes through many phases. He begins something new, gets tired of it, and goes on to something else. They then see Toad go that doesn't stop Mole from grabbing the oars and overturning the boat. Rat helps Mole ashore, and while Mole, embarrassed, dries off, Rat goes seeking the lost picnic basket in the water.

Later, Rat tells Mole not to feel bad or to worry about the day's misadventure after Mole apologizes for his rashness. Rat encourages Mole to become a roommate, which Rat Mole does. Rat makes Mole feel right at home, and the two share stories. Mole has begun his new life.

### Chapter 2

One beautiful summer morning, Mole has a favor to ask Rat. Rat has been along the river bank, composing a song about his friends, the ducks. The ducks delight and amuse Rat, but they don't think much of his poetry, and neither does Mole. Mole wants to call on Mr. Toad, which Rat immediately agrees to, happy to hop in the boat and head out. Rat reveals that, although Toad is not very clever, he is very kind and very gentle. Toad is very rich as well. He has his own private creek with stables and Toad Hall. As they pass the boathouse, they see that all the boats have been slung up, meaning that Toad has tired of boating.



Toad is very happy to see Rat and Mole, explaining that he was just about to send a boat for them. He has something to show them. The three friends sit down in Toad's beautiful house. Toad then brings Rat and Mole to see his gypsy caravan wagon. Toad is ready for the open road, for travels and adventures far and wide. Mole is very intrigued by this, but Rat is not as excited. To him, the caravan seems like a bird cage. Toad has stocked the caravan with everything from paper to tobacco to biscuits, and he is ready to roll out that afternoon. Mole is on board immediately, but Rat doesn't want to go along. Nevertheless, Mole says he will stick by his friend Rat. But Rat has some second-thoughts. Mole agrees to lunch with Toad and Rat.

At last, Rat decides to go along on the trip, out of kindness for Mole. They travel for miles and have a late dinner under the stars. Rat has decided to see the trip through, knowing full well that Toad's fads don't stick very long. The next morning, Mole and Rat go to the nearest town for some supplies, and Toad sleeps in. As they head along, a motor-car comes racing past, leaving them in the dust. But the horse rears and knocks over the caravan onto its side. Toad is very, very sad, while Rat shouts revenge after the motor car.

Suddenly, Toad perks up, amazed by the motor car. He decides he must have one because it is the real way to go out and travel around. They all decide to head to the nearest town. Rat encourages Toad to file a complaint with the police against the motorist, but Toad refuses to do so. He thinks the motor car is a heavenly thing. The three friends catch a train home. The next day word comes that Toad has traveled up to the town to order a motor car.

### Chapter 3

Mole decides he wants to meet Badger, for Badger, rarely seen, still has a tremendous influence and much respect among the other animals. Rat explains that Badger is very antisocial and doesn't like society or invitations, or anything of the sort. He simply turns up as he will. Mole wants to call on Badger, but Rat says that Badger is too shy and would be offended because he is so shy. The summer falls away to autumn, and Mole begins thinking about the Badger again. But, the winter rolls around, and Rat goes to sleep early and sleeps in late, using his few waking hours to receive friends and write poetry. The animals reflect and reminisce on the summer, and they look forward to the following summer.

Mole finally resolves to go and visit Badger on his own one day. The air is cold and the world is gray, but Mole carries on to the Wild Wood. However, the short winter day soon sets on Mole, who finds himself in the Wild Wood approaching dusk. As he heads through the woods, he sees face after face peering out at him. He tries to keep cheerful. Behind him come the sounds of whistling and pattering. Finally, the Mole has had enough. Terrified, he begins to run through the Wood. He comes upon a hollow full of warm, dry leaves, and there he curls up.

Meanwhile, Rat, who has been napping, wakes up to find that Mole is not home. Rat sees Mole's footprints leading to the Wild Wood, arms himself with pistols, and heads



out after Mole. The faces which had scared Mole are scared by the sight of Rat and his pistols. Rat plunges ahead, looking for his best friend. At last, Rat comes across Mole, They are happy to see one another, and Rat explains that the Wild Wood is a place for only those who know its ways, which Mole must still learn. Rat explains that not even brave Mr. Toad would show his face in the Wild Wood alone.

Mole rests up and takes a nap, while Rat stands watch. When Mole wakes up, it is snowing hard. The snow makes everything look different, so getting out of the Wild Wood will be very difficult, to say the least. Unable to find their way out after a few hours, the two animals decide to find shelter for the night. But Mole trips, and cuts his shin, and Rat wraps it up in a handkerchief.

Rat and Mole realize they are at Badger's house, for they have found the dark, green doorway to his home. While Rat keeps digging out the door from the snow, Mole rings the bell.

## Analysis

When Kenneth Graham's young adult novel, "The Wind in the Willows" begins, Mole is a dwelling creature who tends to his home, but one day tires of it. Like the lowly farmhand who casts off his lot for the world, Mole rushes out from home, throwing down his cleaning tools for the sunlight and the open space of the surface world. Mole's emergence from the darkness –like the emergence of the prisoner from Plato's allegorical cave –allows him to experience the world in a way he had never experienced it before, to discover the truth of things around him.

It is Mole's emergence as well that sets the trajectory for the rest of the book. The rash, emotional, and kindhearted Mole quickly comes upon the Water Rat, whom befriends him just as quickly. Mole and Rat become best friends ultimately, and it is Rat's circle of friends that prove to be the catalyst for the adventures that are to be had –most notably, Toad. Indeed, each new friend that Mole meets, and even the most seemingly simple things -such as a picnic- end up being tremendous adventures to Mole, for he has never before experienced such things.

Early on, friendship becomes a hallmark of Kenneth Graham's novel. Rat heroically, and without concern for himself, plunges into the Wild Wood to find his new best friend and roommate Mole. When Rat does find Mole, who is in despair, he doesn't abandon him. Fortunately, they come across Badger's home.

## Discussion Question 1

At the very beginning of the novel, Mole casts off his lot in life in order to seek adventure and see the world. Why do you believe he does this? What evidence in the novel supports your theory?



## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Rat and Mole form such a fast and sure friendship? What things do they have in common? Do they have differences in their personalities that strengthen their friendship? Explain.

## Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Mole's life before and after meeting Rat. What things change? Is Mole happy with this new life? Why or why not? Use evidence from the novel to support your conclusion.

## Vocabulary

Imperiously, seclusion, progressive, ecstasies, chirruped, provender, impromptu, etiquette, emancipated.



# Chapter 4-6

## Summary

### Chapter 4

After what seems like an eternity, Mole and Rat receive a response at Badger's door. Badger is cranky that someone has disturbed him at such a time of night, but when he sees that it is Rat and Mole, his tone changes to friendly, and he lets them in quickly. He brings them before a warm fire and gives them supper. Badger's home is one of many tunnels and halls and passageways, mysterious and exciting. Badger even attends to Mole's hurt shin, bandaging it up properly.

After the three animals eat, they sit before the fire, and Badger asks for news of the River, especially about Toad. Rat reveals that Toad has taken to driving motor cars, crashing one after another, insisting always on driving himself rather than hiring a driver. Toad has owned seven motor cars in succession by this point. The animals wonder if they should do something to help Toad because he is their friend. They agree they shall all try to reason with Toad in the warmer weather, for animals are not to strain themselves or do anything heroic in the winter. Soon after, the animals all turn in for bed.

In the morning at breakfast, Badger entertains two young hedgehogs, who have become lost in the snow on their way to school. They are eating breakfast when Rat and Mole wake up. Badger has already eaten, and has gone to his study, where he will do the work of sleeping. The doorbell rings, and it is Otter, who reports that the folks along the River Bank have all been worried because Rat and Mole were not at home the previous night. Otter has tracked them down. He's given breakfast.

The hedgehogs leave later on, and then Badger, Mole, Rat, and Otter sit down for lunch. After lunch, Badger gives Mole a tour of the house. They travel from passage to tunnel to hall. Badger explains that once upon a time, before the Wild Wood grew, a great civilization flourished in Badger's present, enormous home. People build and come and go, explains the Badger. Badger is likewise horrified to learn of Mole's sad experiences with the present residents of the Wild Wood. He says that he will send word round the next day to respect and let Mole go where he may.

After the tour, they find Rat worrying about being underground. He wants to go home. Otter offers to lead the way, but Badger simply takes them along his tunnels, which lead to the edge of the woods. No one else knows about the tunnels. Beyond the Wild Woods, Otter, Mole, and Rat hurry along home.

### Chapter 5

Rat and Mole return from a wonderful day's outing with Otter, coming back across the sheep pastures, but they come across a town as well. They are worried about the





people who live in the town, but Rat says the people are not to be feared, for they are all huddled around fires with their cats and dogs in the winter. It is mid-December. As they travel through the town and continue along, Mole smells a familiar scent which is that of home. As Rat continues on, Mole wants to stay behind and see his old home once more. He is homesick. However, Mole will not allow his best friend to carry on alone, and so he goes after Rat, who says they can return the following day.

When Mole begins crying a short time later, Rat asks what is the matter. Mole explains that he misses his home. It is his home like everyone else has their own homes, and that his home is his own place. Rat realizes how painful things are for his friend Mole. So, the two of them set back off to find Mole's home. Mole can sense his home, and he and Rat begin looking far and wide for the home. At last they find it. They scurry into Mole's home. It is warm and familiar to Mole, but Mole knows that it must look a fright and must be cold to Rat. But Rat is very friendly and not dismayed. Mole begins to cheer up slowly, and then he hears the field mice coming along,. They are singing Christmas carols because it is December.

Mole is very happy to hear the carols being sung. The field mice sing and then come in to warm themselves by the fire. Rat sends off to the shops for various things to make supper, which is made after the mice do some acting. The mice then leave for the evening, and Rat tells Mole that his house is a very fine home. He turns in to sleep for the night.

## Chapter 6

It is early summer once more. The animal world is alive and warm and full of promise. Mole and Rat are busy preparing boats for boating season when a visitor comes. It is Badger, who declares that Toad's hour is at hand. Badger learns that Toad is to receive a new motor car that very morning, and they all three decide to go and see Toad. Toad is delighted that his friends have come to call on him, but the visit is not one of a friendly nature. Toad is brought inside by his friends, and Badger sends the motor car back to the shop.

Toad is incensed, demanding to know what is going on. Badger explains very rationally that Toad is squandering the money left to him by his father. He is risking his life and making other animals think poorly of their district. But Rat believes that simply talking to Toad will never cure him. Something else is needed. The Badger takes Toad aside privately. When Toad comes back to the others, he is saddened and shaken. Toad has promised to give up motor cars forever. But, Toad refuses to repeat this promise in front of Mole and Rat. Instead, Toad proclaims that he will head off in the first motor car that he sees.

Badger then regrets that persuasion will not work on Toad. Force must be used instead. The three friends will see to it that Toad cannot leave his house until he changes his ways. Toad ultimately sinks into depression. Toad hams it up, pretending he is dying. Indeed, Toad calls for a lawyer, and Rat believes Toad must be really bad off if he wants a lawyer instead of a doctor.



With Rat gone to fetch a lawyer, Toad springs out of bed, gets dressed, and climbs out through the window. Rat, Badger, and Mole are aghast that Toad has fled, but they agree to sleep nights at Toad Hall, for they believe Toad will either be brought back on a stretcher or between two policemen. Toad, meanwhile, is pleasantly amused with and proud of, himself. As he walks along, he finds an unattended motor car, and he jumps in to take off. Toad is arrested for the theft and convicted. He is put in jail.

## Analysis

Fortunately for Rat and Mole, Badger is at home. He welcomes Mole and Rat inside, where he feeds and shelters them, allowing them to regain their strength. As Rat and Mole recover, they learn about the extent of Badger's quiet knowledge and wisdom, as well as his unfailing generosity. Badger here represents a semblance of the landed aristocracy, the Burkean wealthy, and the concept of noblesse oblige (that the wealthy should be honorable, generous, respectful, and helpful, especially to those not situated well financially). Mole and Rat also take these lessons of compassion to heart, as they will extend such tendencies beyond what they already have, in the future.

As the winter passes and spring emerges across the British countryside, Mole and Rat prepare for the warm weather, and for more adventures. As such, they prepare boats for the river. But unfortunately, the ever-wild and ever-raucous Toad decides to steal a motor-car which compels a warrant for his arrest. Toad's reckless abandon therefore sets the stage for the second half of the novel. The character of Toad also sets in stark contrast the divide between the landed gentry, and the nouveau-riche. The calm, cool, collected, and responsible Badger is a far cry from the wild, indecisive, profligate, and narcissistic Toad.

## Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the characters of Toad and Badger. How are these characters similar? How are they different? Do Mole and Rat learn lessons from one, the other, or both? What lessons can be learned from both?

## Discussion Question 2

What does Toad do that gets him in trouble with the law? How do Mole, Rat, and the other animals respond? Do you approve or disapprove of their response? Explain.

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Toad decide to bolt from his home and steal a motorcar? Do you believe this was foolish? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

Indignantly, boisterously, amiable, wistfully, monotone, personage, evasively, debonair, odorous, languorous, cudgel, valorous, ardour, mirth, injunctions, simultaneously.



## Chapter 7-9

### Summary

#### Chapter 7

The Willow-Wren is singing his songs near the edge of the River Bank when Rat and Mole come along. Rat explains that Little Portly, an otter, is missing. He usually goes missing but always turns up, but the otters are still worried. Otter himself is even worried, and that is saying something. Mole decides they should help try to find Little Portly rather than go to sleep, and Rat concurs. They set out at once along the river.

They explore along the banks and through a willow tree. But as they travel, they begin to hear absolutely beautiful music, and they follow it to the source. The land before them is bright and green and beautiful and clear. They come upon a creature that is half-man and half-horse playing pipes. It is Pan. Then, the vision before them vanishes. They find Little Portly, whom they send back to Otter, watching as the two reunite.

#### Chapter 8

Toad, in prison, believes that his life is over. He believes he will never be out in the world again. The jailer's daughter goes to see Toad one day, for her father is tired of dealing with the whining animal. The daughter tells Toad to cheer up. Toad is inconsolable. The daughter visits Toad day after day, slowly cheering Toad up by getting him to talk about Toad Hall and all of his animal friends. The girl comes to feel sorry for Toad and arranges to have Toad buy some of her aunt's clothing for a few pounds, for she is a poor washer woman, Toad agrees to the plan.

Dressed in washer woman's clothing, Toad makes his escape. He then heads to the nearest town. From there, he heads to the train station, but he realize he has left behind his coat, waistcoat, wallet, and everything else important. Toad tries to play himself off as something important to the clerk at the station. However, since he is in old, beat-up clothing, the clerk laughs him aside. Toad pretends then to have lost all his money. He entreats the engine-driver to give him a ride in exchange for washing some dirty shirts for the driver. Toad agrees. The train goes on and on for miles and miles.

Up ahead, the police are prepared to pursue the train. Toad confesses his identity and his crime to the driver. Toad begs the driver to spare him. The driver consents to helping Toad. Toad then jumps from the train, ending up in an unknown patch of woods. He travels and travels. At last he is so tired that he goes to sleep in the hollow of a tree.

#### Chapter 9

As the summer continues and the season slowly draws to an end, Rat finds that he is restless. Rat knows that settling down for the winter is around the corner. He knows that this is difficult to do after a wonderful summer. Rat goes out and about to discover



animals tending to their end of summer chores. The field mice are already preparing for the winter. Rat goes to the willow trees, where the birds are discussing their plans for departure. Rat invites the birds to stay on, but they kindly reject his offer.

The rat continues on, looking off at the far mountains and the waning summer skies. Suddenly, the Rat sees another rat, a Wayfarer, coming toward him. The Wayfarer is dusty and well-traveled. The Rat asks the Wayfarer about his travels, and the Wayfarer replies that he has had enough of wayfaring and is venturing home. Six months away has been too much. The Wayfarer had gone out seeking, only to discover that home was what he was searching for all along. The Wayfarer has been as far as Venice, and he remembers good times and good friends. He goes on to Corsica and Sardinia, growing more and more restless.

The Rat offers the Wayfarer food, which the Wayfarer graciously accepts as he tells more of his adventures. The Wayfarer tells the Rat to go out and have adventures while he can. The Rat returns home and packs, prepared to head out into the wild. But, Mole knocks some common sense into Rat's head. Rat, no longer feeling restless, turns to poetry.

## Analysis

The friendship that Rat and Mole have built extends to the other animals in ways previously unseen. Such friendship consists in Rat and Mole searching high and low to find Otter's lost family member, going far out of their way to do so, and to lend a helping hand. Toad, meanwhile, is trapped in prison, dealing with the consequences of his poor life choices. His irresponsibility has at long last come back to haunt him. Toad is, as could be expected, in absolute misery. But Toad's misery and histrionics only lead to invariably humorous actions, escaping from jail dressed as a washer woman. Toad then becomes an escaped convict, pursued by the police, and by the repercussions of his lifestyle. A clear case for living responsibly is made throughout the second half of Kenneth Graham's novel.

Interestingly enough, whereas in the past, Mole has been restless, Rat suddenly realizes that he is restless. He has the urge to travel, especially when a traveling rat comes through. In an age-old observation, the Wayfarer explains that he has discovered what he has been searching for all along. It is at home. Home is worth seeking and worth being a little restless. Rat, seeking the same adventure but tired of home altogether, is nevertheless persuaded by Mole not to go out on such an adventure.

## Discussion Question 1

In what ways have the characters of Mole and Rat evolved as empathetic individuals since the beginning of the novel? What actions do they pursue in accordance with this growth as empathetic individuals? Is this growth for the better? Explain.



## Discussion Question 2

Describe Toad's condition while in prison. Why is Toad so unhappy? What does he do about it? Do you think Toad will change his ways? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Toad seeks mercy from the driver of the train. Why does he do this? What is the driver's decision on whether or not to allow Toad to escape? Why do you think the driver did this?

## Vocabulary

Pulsated, paroxysm, dolorously, habiliments, turbid, sonorous, abhorrence, raiment, contentedly.



# Chapter 10-11

## Summary

### Chapter 10

When Toad wakes up in his hollow tree, he is cold. Then, he remembers he is free, and he is excited to face the day once more. Toad strikes out and comes across a canal, where he finds a horse and boat. Toad tells the woman aboard the boat that he is in trouble and needs help. He pretends to be an old washer woman. The woman on the boat invites Toad aboard.

The woman has Toad do her laundry while they are on board. Toad is quite unhappy to be doing manual labor, especially washing women's clothing. The barge-woman laughs at Toad's poor attempts to wash and then throws him off the boat. Toad climbs out of the canal, rushes forth, unhitches the horse, and gallops away from the barge. Later on, Toad sells the horse to a gypsy and continues on.

As Toad travels along, he becomes conceited and writes a song about himself, his adventures, and his escapes from the law. But, as Toad goes along, his strength and courage give way. Up ahead is the Red Lion Inn, from where he had stolen the motor car that had landed him in jail. Toad is horrified he will be recognized. Two gentlemen come along in a motor car and mistake Toad for an old washer-woman. They give him a lift.

Toad encourages the men to let him drive. When he does, the thrill of the adventure makes him shout out his true identity, and the gentlemen are stunned. A call is sent out to capture Toad. The police arrive and begin to chase Mr. Toad. He stumbles into the river and is carried away by the current. He comes upon Rat.

### Chapter 11

Rat pulls Toad out of the water. Toad immediately begins complaining and carrying on about the series of misadventures he has had since breaking out of his house. Rat, however, orders Toad upstairs to change, which Toad does. Rat talks to Toad, explaining the bad reputation he has acquired over the past year. While the River-Bankers stuck up for Toad, the Wild Wooders scoffed. They broke into Toad Hall and took over. The home has subsequently become a wreck. Toad marches down to his house, but he is driven off at gunpoint. He rushes back to Rat.

Toad is determined to have his home back. Toad returns by boat, but the boat is sunk by the Wild Wooders. Toad is distraught, and Rat scolds Toad for everything he has done for the past year. Badger and Mole show up. While Badger isn't exactly thrilled to see Toad, he isn't angry to see him either. Mole is very happy to have Toad back. Toad believes all is lost. He thinks that he has lost his home forever.



Nevertheless, a plan is constructed whereby Badger, Toad, Mole, and Rat will sneak into the house through the Butler's Pantry, and then storm the rest of the house, driving the Wild Wooders out. Mole has initiated the first part of the plan by pretending to be a washer-woman. He goes to see the sentinels around Toad Hall, asking them if they would like their laundry done. Mole also lets it drop that an army of rats and toads and badgers are preparing for a massive assault that very evening on Toad Hall. The Wild Wooders go crazy to prepare for the attack.

## Analysis

Toad is living on the edge when he awakens, cold and miserable, but then happy to be free. Toad's return home is as hysterical as his escape from prison, full of misadventures and humbling experiences, from being forced into manual labor, to being thrown off the boat. Toad's sense of self-aggrandizement leads him into considering himself something of a heroic outlaw, even going through such lengths as to write a song about himself.

By far, Toad's most humbling experience is returning home to find that his home is no longer home. It has been taken over by Wild Wooders. So, not only has Toad lost his home -the base of his existence- but he is also compelled to ask his friends for help once more -the very same friends that he took advantage of and took for granted much earlier in the novel. Rat, Mole, and Badger demonstrate themselves to be utterly loyal, dependable, and true friends, as they join in with Toad in the plan to reclaim Toad Hall. Escaping from jail, losing his house, and crawling back to his friends will help to secure the future for Toad, but, perhaps, in a way that the reader does not anticipate.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Toad discover when he returns to his home? How does he react? How do his friends respond to his crisis? What would you have done? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of friendship in Kenneth Grahame's novel, "The Wind in the Willows". What is friendship? Among which characters does friendship occur? Is friendship a positive or negative thing in the novel? Explain using evidence from the story.

## Discussion Question 3

While the book is intended for children and young people, there are many historical references and political comments in the novel. Select one such historical reference or political comment, describe it, and explain it, including its relevance to the novel.



## Vocabulary

Lilting, immured, medieval, audacious, lurid, stringent, pettifogging, frivolous, bedraggled.



# Chapter 12

## Summary

### Chapter 12

That night, Badger, Rat, Toad, and Mole, all arm themselves to the teeth. They use a secret passageway to enter Toad Hall through the Butler's Pantry. Meanwhile, they can overhear the weasels, the leaders of the Wild Wooders, partying in the banquet hall, while all the other animals are on guard. The four friends leap out, scaring many of the weasels away, knocking others out, and fighting still more weasels who in turn, flee. The animals outside flee as well. The knocked-out weasels are taken prisoner. They promise not to bother them again and are released.

Toad, who is very pleased with himself, decides that a banquet with invitations shall be in order. Toad even writes a program of entertainment for the evening, with speeches and poems and songs by him. Rat and Mole tell Toad there shall be no such things at the banquet. Toad gives it some thought, and at the celebration banquet, he gives Badger, Mole, and Rat their just dues. Those in attendance are even more thrilled for Toad. Later on, Toad makes good on all of his debts, including to the washer-woman for her horse. Then, he happily continues to improve his life and live in the company of his friends.

## Analysis

Jail hasn't been enough for Toad to have learned his lesson or learned the error of his ways. Toad conspires to break out of jail and falls right back into his old ways of histrionics, cajoling, and stealing. Even more embarrassing to Toad's character and damaging to his honor is his impersonation of a woman in order to get ahead any way that he can.

But interestingly enough, whereas Mole escapes his home for adventure, Mole's character is intact. He can freely return home and leave again as he pleases. Toad returns home to find it has been taken over by Jacobin-like Wild Wooders, in the attempt to outdo the aristocracy. Like the French monarchs and many of their upper-class elites, Toad has shirked his Burkean duties of noblesse-oblige. He has not maintained a worthy and respectable personage.

Unlike the horrors of the French Revolution, Toad has friends who are willing to help him reclaim his home and his station in nature. Because of this and the misadventures he has had, Toad turns over a new leaf and becomes a respected aristocrat once more. He is even respected by the animals of the Wild Wood.

Indeed, Grahame's obvious support, encouragement, pride in English sensibility, and Christian goodwill ultimately bear the trials and tribulations the four friends face



consistently. It is ultimately friendship and compassion that win the day. Everything that has come to pass has occurred because Mole decided that he should throw down his cleaning tools and break out of his cave to see what was in the world. Yet, unlike man, Mole can go home. The ideas of dwelling, of belonging, and of home are profoundly important then. Mole and his friends have found that they truly do belong.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of adventure in Kenneth Grahame's novel, "The Wind in the Willows." What is adventure? Which characters experience adventure? Choose a character and describe one of their adventures. How do these adventures affect the character? Does the adventure benefit him? Change him for the better? Hurt him? Explain.

## Discussion Question 2

Describe some of the influences that can be detected in Kenneth Grahame's novel "The Wind in the Willows," such as romanticism, fantasy, and politics. Why do you think Grahame is influenced by these? What larger implications do these influences have? (Consider the year 1908 in which the book is written and the events that are taking shape in the world.)

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of forgiveness in Kenneth Grahame's novel, "The Wind in the Willows". What is forgiveness? Among which characters does forgiveness occur, and why? How does forgiveness affect the plot of the novel? What comes of forgiveness? Explain.

## Vocabulary

Disreputable, ignominiously, portentous, vigorously, belaboring, penitent, countenance, mirth, melancholy.



# Characters

## Mole

Given to mood swings of happiness, depression, and rashness, Mole is a kindhearted little mole whose distaste of spring chores sets off the adventures of the novel "The Wind in the Willows" by Kenneth Grahame. He goes barreling through the sunlight, meeting and becoming friends with Rat, with whom he becomes roommates. Mole is happy to meet Otter, Badger, and Toad, all in due course. Mole has his own moments of foolhardiness and rashness, such as when he rushes into the Wild Wood without a second thought just before a snowstorm hits. Mole also clearly demonstrates his wonderful compassion by refusing to sleep until Otter's relative, Little Portly, can be found.

## Rat

Very friendly, always the optimist, Rat owns and runs a boat business for boating season in the summer. Rat is very kind and forgiving, and deeply poetic. He often composes poetry and lyrics, which he finds to be very comforting, even if others do not think it so. Rat is very much a homebody, disliking to be away from his home at the River Bank for even more than a day. Rat is best friends with Mole, whom he meets in the spring one day. The two become roommates, and head out on many adventures. Rat is also friends with Otter, Toad, and Badger, and introduces Mole to these animals.

## Otter

Otter is a clever, quick, and kind otter who lives at the River Bank. He is good friends with Mole, Rat, Toad, and Badger. He finds Mole and Rat when they are lost in a snowstorm. Otter is also the relative of Little Portly.

## Badger

Badger is a slow, powerful, and deeply rational badger who lives in the Wild Wood. He is respected by animals both near and far. He is good friends with Rat, Mole, Toad, and Otter. He takes care of Mole and Rat when they are lost in a snowstorm, and he also takes care of wayward animals when they come to his door.

## Mr. Toad

A wealthy heir, Mr. Toad spends his days going through various fads, from boating to gypsy traveling to motor-car driving. Mr. Toad is a dandy, given to flights of fancy, and histrionics. He is wasting away his wealth, and his good name, and is therefore the



subject of an intervention by his friends, Mole, Rat, and Badger. He refuses to listen to reason, steals a motor-car, goes to jail, escapes in disguise as a washer-woman, and returns home to find his house has been overtaken by Wild Wooders. With his friends, he retakes the house and, finally, settles down to become a respectable gentleman and pillar of society.

## **The Field Mice**

The field mice are neighbors of Mole. Every year at Christmas, they sing carols and have a late dinner with Mole and Rat.

## **Billy**

Billy is a young hedgehog. He and his brother become lost in a snowstorm. They seek refuge at Badger's house. It is there that they meet Rat and Mole.

## **Little Portly**

Little Portly is a young otter, who is related to Otter. He goes missing one day, but he is found by Mole and Rat, who reunite him with Otter.

## **The Wayfarer**

A Sea Rat, the Wayfarer has journeyed to Venice, Sardinia, and other places. He is returning home when he passes by Rat. Rat is very impressed with the Wayfarer, who instills in Rat the desire to travel.

## **The Barge Woman**

The Barge Woman owns and runs a barge on the canal to the River that is traveled upon by Toad. Seeing Toad is a fraud, the Barge Woman throws him overboard, only to have her horse stolen by Toad, who later pays her back.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Motor Car

The Motor Car, a new invention, is all the rage and Toad's new fad. He crashes seven of them and steals two more. They land him in jail the first time and hot water the second time.

## Gypsy Caravan

A gypsy caravan wagon is purchased by Toad. It is one of his fads. He embarks on an adventure with Rat and Mole in a caravan, but it is overturned by a passing motor car and rendered inoperable.

## Pistols

Pistols are worn and used by Rat, Mole, Toad, and Badger when they reclaim Toad Hall. Pistols are also wielded and used by the Wild Wooders that have taken over Toad Hall.

## Picnic Lunch

Picnic lunches are packed by Rat to be enjoyed by him and Mole while out boating, including on their first leisurely afternoon. While boating, Mole becomes excited by the prospect of rowing, and begins rocking the boat to grab the oars and row. During this time, the picnic lunch is accidentally knocked overboard. Mole promptly apologizes for losing the picnic lunch, but Rat is very forgiving, telling Mole not to worry about it.



# Settings

## Mole's Burrow

Small, but comfortable, and full of aesthetic belongings, Mole's Burrow is home to Mole. It is left and visited by Mole throughout the book. Mole's Burrow is where Rat comes to spend the night and to listen to the Field Mice sing Christmas carols.

## The River

The River lies near the meadow. It is the home of Rat, Otter, and Toad. It is also the river into which Toad's private creek feeds. Many of the adventures that Rat and Mole have occur along the River.

## The Wild Wood

The Wild Wood is a dark and forbidding place, and it is where Badger lives. The Wild Wood has a bad and wild reputation, until the battle at Toad Hall turns the occupants of the Wild Wood into respectable people. Mole and Rat become lost in the Wild Woods during a snowstorm, but they are rescued by Badger and found later by Otter.

## Toad Hall

Toad Hall is a magnificent family home, inherited by Toad. It is a wonderful place that is captured by the Wild Wooders. It is then freed from their clutches by Toad and his friends.

## The Town

The town is located near Mole's burrow. It is full of people, cats, and dogs. It lies along the road and is traveled through by Rat and Mole around Christmas.



# Themes and Motifs

## Adventure

Adventure is a major theme in the novel “The Wind in the Willows” by Kenneth Grahame. Adventures –exciting, unusual, and/or risky experiences and undertakings – populate the entire novel. Each of the animals in the novel has some form of adventure or other, including Mole and Rat. Indeed, Toad not only has adventures, but misadventures –undertakings and experiences that are disastrous or that do not proceed according to plan.

For Mole, adventures begin from the very first page of the novel, when he casts down his cleaning tools and heads out in the world above. Indeed, every step he takes –from the burrow to the town to the meadows to the river –are all adventurous activities to Mole. Attempting to paddle a boat, looking for Little Portly, and taking on the Wild Wooders at Toad Hall are all feats of adventure. For Rat, adventures include spending more and more time away from his home, for he is a homebody, and traveling with Toad and Mole on the gypsy caravan.

For Toad, a sense of misadventure seems to be his only adventure.. His flights of fancy and his penchant for fads ultimately lead to him recklessly crashing seven motor cars and stealing another motor car. He lands in jail and escapes as a washer-woman. He is promptly thrown into the water from a barge. He returns home and steals another motor car, almost being caught by the police once more. When Toad arrives home, he finds it to have been conquered by Wild Wooders, and then Toad must fight to reclaim his home with Rat, Mole, and Badger.

## Friendship

Friendship is a major theme in the novel, “The Wind in the Willows,” by Kenneth Grahame. Friendship includes feelings of emotional connection and unconditional loyalty to others. Friendship occurs between many of the characters in the novel, including Rat, Mole, Badger, and Toad. Friendship appears in two predominant ways in the novel, including the feeling of belonging and having unconditional loyalty.

In terms of belonging, one gets the sense that when Mole leaves his burrow, he does not have too many friends. But, when he meets Rat, the two become best friends and roommates. They go on many adventures together, and Mole truly does feel at home among his new found friends. Because of this, Mole has a sense of belonging, of fitting in, of knowing that he has friends he can trust, depend on, and turn to in times of trouble –and likewise, do so in response.

In terms of unconditional loyalty, friendship occurs predominantly among the characters of Rat and Mole, and later of Rat, Mole, and Badger toward Toad. The loyalty of Rat toward Mole is clearly demonstrated when Rat braves the Wild Wood alone to go and





rescue Mole, who has rashly gone off to make friends with Badger. Rat risks his own well-being for his friend's recovery. In the case of Toad, even after Toad has proved to be a character of histrionics and without real stability, even besmirching the reputation of his friends by association, Rat, Mole, and Badger remain loyal, and help Toad reclaim his home, and his honor.

## Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a major and dominant theme in the novel, "The Wind in the Willows", by Kenneth Grahame. Forgiveness, which includes recognition and pardoning of past sins, grievances, and offenses, perforates nearly every part of the book. Forgiveness occurs in a menial but important way between Rat and Mole at two points, and forgiveness occurs at an even greater level when it comes to Toad.

The friendship between, and kindly nature of both Mole and Rat, means that transgressions of various natures can be easily forgiven. When Mole rashly grabs the oars away from Rat to paddle the boat they are in following their picnic, Mole capsizes them, causing the picnic basket to be lost in the river below. Mole apologizes profusely, and Rat quickly and unhesitatingly forgives him. When Rat insensitively passes by Mole's home without allowing a stop, he recognizes his blunder, apologizes, and quickly accedes to spending the night at Mole's home. Because both Mole and Rat have forgiven, and have a need to be forgiven, they are stronger and better individuals because of it.

The greatest exercise of forgiveness (and patience, for that matter), comes with the goodhearted but flighty Toad. Toad's misadventures, cajoling, and impertinence land not only himself in trouble, but also threaten the reputations of his friends. Yet, even when Toad has bamboozled his friends, he comes back and appeals to them for help and forgiveness. Generously, and kindly, his friends do forgive him. Not only do they forgive him, but they go so far as to help Toad reclaim not only his home of Toad Hall, but also of his respect, honor, and station in society.



# Styles

## Point of View

Kenneth Graham tells his novel “The Wind in the Willows” from the third-person omniscient perspective. Because the world of Graham’s novel is one of animals and fantasy, it is best left to the third person narrator to explain to the reader the things that go on in the animal world and the relationships between the animals, for these are things unfamiliar to the readers in the human world. For example, numerous asides are made which pertain to the ways of animal etiquette. The third person narration also acts as a stable voice which relates the adventures of diverse characters and their experiences, making reading between these different characters and experiences effortless.

## Language and Meaning

Kenneth Graham tells his novel “The Wind in the Willows” in language that is poetic, educated, and gentle. This is done for at least three reasons. Since the book was written at a time when standards of education were very high, it is only expected that the language employed in the book should be reminiscent of the times. The book deals with a world of fantastical bucolic splendor, so the language is poetic and reminiscent of the romantics, who placed so much emphasis on nature –the very thing the characters in the book occupy as home. The third reason the language is poetic, educated, and gentle is because the book is aimed at a younger audience. This gentle language makes the adventures contained in the book readily accessible to younger audiences, who experience dashes of poetic prose and education as they read.

## Structure

Kenneth Graham divides his novel “The Wind in the Willows” into twelve chronological, successive chapters. Each chapter revolves around a specific event. For example, the first chapter deals with Mole’s venturing out of his home and meeting Rat, while the eighth chapter deals with Toad’s escape from prison. As the book progresses and Toad ends up in jail, the chapters alternate between the adventures Rat and Mole have and the misadventures Toad has in getting home. This simple and uncomplicated structure allows the reader to focus on the story and not to be hampered by what would be an unnecessarily complicated structure.



## Quotes

Whether you get away, or whether you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you've done it there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not.

-- Rat (Chapter 1 paragraph p. 10)

**Importance:** In this quote, the stage is set for the entire novel. Adventures, misadventures, surprises, and the daily routine all factor into life, and factor into the rest of "The Wind in the Willows". Rat is speaking to Mole about the things that occur in life, and that whether one is working at home, or out in the world exploring, there is always something which keeps people busy.

Boating is played out. He's tired of it, and done with it. I wonder what new fad he has taken up now? Come along and let's look him up.

-- Rat (Chapter 2 paragraph p. 21)

**Importance:** Here, Rat is speaking to Mole about Toad, and Toad's lack of attention, commitment, and responsibility. He demonstrates how Toad is always crazed by something new, be it boating or cars or living like a gypsy. This also demonstrates the danger of having a lot of wealth, but nothing to do.

And as he lay there panting and trembling and listened to the whistlings and the patterings outside, he knew it at last, in all its fullness, that dread thing which other little dwellers in field and hedgerow had encountered here, and known as their darkest moment –that thing which the Rat had vainly tried to shield him from –the Terror of the Wild Wood!

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph p. 35)

**Importance:** The quote taken here from the novel details Mole's recklessness of charging headlong into the Wild Wood, getting lost, getting fearful, and being helpless against the forces of the world arrayed around him. Mole, like so many more animals before him, has surrendered to the horrors of the Wild Wood. Yet, this also provides the avenue for Rat to demonstrate his friendship, by rescuing Mole.

Once well underground," he said, "you know exactly where you are. Nothing can happen to you, and nothing can get at you. You're entirely your own master, and you don't have to consult anybody or mind what they say. Things go on all the same overhead, and you let 'em, and don't bother about 'em. When you want to, up you go, and there the things are, waiting for you.

-- Badger (Chapter 4 paragraph p. 50)

**Importance:** Here, Badger explains to Mole the way it is to live underground, and how things will continue on in the world above, with or without Badger present. But living underground (off the grid, out in the mountains, on the farms, in the wild), one is one's



own master, and one is nearly, or entirely, self-autonomous. This sense of freedom is quite appealing to Mole, for freedom can come in the home, in the wild, or underground.

It takes all sorts to make a world.

-- Badger (Chapter 4 paragraph p. 52)

**Importance:** Here, Badger speaks to Mole about the animals and people in the world, good and bad. The world would not be the world without them, without all sorts.

Home! That was what they meant, those caressing appeals, those soft touches wafted through the air, those invisible little hands pulling and tugging, all one way!

-- Narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph p. 57)

**Importance:** In this quote, Mole nears and returns home, not understanding just how much he has missed it. As he draws closer, and the sights, smells, and sounds become familiar, Mole's heart yearns and aches for home more and more. Mole knows his home is not much to look at, but his home is home, and he wants to go back.

Animals when in company walk in a proper and sensible manner, in single file, instead of sprawling all across the road and being of no use or support to each other in case of sudden trouble or danger.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph p. 70)

**Importance:** In a humorous, but appropriate aside to the reader, reminding the reader of human sensibility, respect, and politesse, the narrator explains animal etiquette for traveling down a public thoroughfare. This is also important so that, if in duress, the animals can help one another in proper order, rather than being scattered about and unable to assist those in front.

Dance music –the lilting sort that runs on without a stop –but with words in it, too –it passes into words and out of them again –I catch them at intervals –then it is dance music once more, and then nothing but the reeds' soft thin whispering.

-- Rat (Chapter 7 paragraph p. 91)

**Importance:** Here, Rat explains eloquently to Mole the importance of music, and how nature itself creates a sort of music that whispers and lingers in the ears, and in the heart. Music is beautiful, with or without words, and music without words can lead the listener to understand words not sung or spoken; and in this same way, nature, without music, creates its own sort of music, which in turn evokes feelings and stirrings within the heart.

Do be quiet a minute, Toad," said the girl. "You talk too much, and that's your chief fault, and I'm trying to think, and you hurt my head.

-- The Jailer's Daughter (Chapter 8 paragraph p. 95)

**Importance:** This humorous quote illustrates Toad's effect on others, especially the jailer's daughter. His histrionics and outbursts get on the nerves of everyone. The jailer's



daughter, at long last, says clearly and without equivocation what others have been too polite to tell Toad.

All the animals cheered when he entered, and crowded round to congratulate him and say nice things about his courage, and his cleverness, and his fighting qualities; but Toad only smiled faintly and murmured, "Not at all!"... He was indeed an altered Toad!  
-- Narrator/Toad (Chapter 12 paragraph pp. 163-164)

**Importance:** This quote illustrates the promise that Toad has made to change his life and the result of following through with that decision. Whereas before, Toad was a charming acquaintance who wore out his welcome way too quickly, Toad is now a respected and welcome member of the community.