

Teacher Notes

Spinifex Mouse

written and illustrated by Norma MacDonald

Magabala Books

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SYNOPSIS

Cheeky is a Spinifex Hopping Mouse. He lives up to his name, showing off and greedily eating spinifex seeds. Little does he know that Brown Snake is watching his every move. Set in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, *Spinifex Mouse* is a story about the nature of a little mouse and the very important lesson that he learns.

THEMES

Spinifex Hopping Mouse

- The habitat and behaviour of the Spinifex Hopping Mouse is included.
- The mouse's predators play an important role in the narrative.

Family

- Cheeky is relieved to be back with his family.

Greed

- Cheeky becomes less careful when he greedily eats spinifex seeds. His actions lead to near-catastrophic consequences.

WRITING STYLE

Written in third person, past tense, *Spinifex Mouse* incorporates figurative language to help instil a sense of prey versus predator. There is a clear moral for readers that greed and showing off can be problematic.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- *Spinifex Mouse* is set in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Locate the Pilbara on a map of Australia.

- Research what spinifex is. What animals eat spinifex? How is this vegetation crucial to the Australian environment?
- The author uses figurative language in the text. Explore examples of this, discussing the author's choice of language features. Examples include:
 - *The snake slithered out from under the log*
 - *The sun was rising and a warm glow crept over the blue hills and across the land*
 - *She would wait for the sun to warm her body*
 - *She flicked her tongue about*
 - *Spinifex hopping mouse kicking up the dust as it scurried and slid through the tall grass*
 - *Cheeky heard a roar like a strong wind*
 - *A rush of air whirred past his head*
- Research the Spinifex Hopping Mouse. Create an information report about this creature. Include headings such as appearance, diet, habitat and reproduction.
 - <http://www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/animals-plants/australia/nocturnal-house/spinifex-hopping-mouse/>
 - http://www.marsupialsociety.org/spinifex_hopping_mouse.html
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GROQWgpQDO0>
- What's in a name? Discuss the author's choice of name for the mouse. How might the mouse's character change as a result of his name change? What is your opinion of his new name?
- How does Cheeky grow and change from the beginning to the end of the text?
- Create a mind map of Cheeky's character traits. Give examples from the text that help to illustrate his characteristics.
- Write a reflection of the story, including what you see as the main message or moral of *Spinifex Mouse*.
- Discuss the artwork in *Spinifex Mouse*. How do the illustrations contribute to the text?
- Cheeky gets picked up by a bird of prey. He hangs upside down. Draw a picture of what Cheeky might have seen whilst upside down in the talons of the bird.
- Compare *Spinifex Mouse* with Narelle Oliver's *Fox and Fine Feathers*. How are these stories similar and different? Create a table or mid map to show this comparison.