

English Language Arts

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE: SESSION 2

DIRECTIONS

This session contains one reading selection with eight multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

This story is told by Nicodemus, the leader of the rats of NIMH. Read as he describes how he and the other rats were surprised one day at the marketplace. Pay attention as the seemingly calm events lead to a thrilling end. Answer the questions that follow.

The Marketplace

from *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*

by Robert C. O'Brien

- 1 . . . It was called the Farmers' Market, a great square of a place with a roof over part of it and no walls to speak of. There early every morning the farmers arrived from all over the surrounding countryside, with trucks full of tomatoes, corn, cabbages, potatoes, eggs, chickens, hams, food for the city. One part of it was reserved for the fishermen who brought crabs and oysters and bass and flounders. It was a fine place, noisy and full of smells.
- 2 We lived near this market—my father, my mother, my nine sisters and brothers and I—underground in a big pipe that had once been part of a storm sewer, but was no longer used. There were hundreds of other rats in the neighborhood. It was a rough life, but not so hard as you might think, because of the market.
- 3 Every evening at five o'clock the farmers and the fishermen would close up their stalls, pack their trucks, and go home. At night, hours later, the cleanup men would arrive with brooms and hoses. But in between, the market was ours. The food the farmers left behind! Peas and beans that fell from the trucks, tomatoes and squashes, pieces of meat and fish trimmed as waste—they lay on the sidewalks and in the gutters; they filled great cans that were supposed to be covered but seldom were. There was always ten times more than we could eat, and so there was never any need for fighting over it.
- 4 Fighting? Quite the contrary, the marketplace was a perfect place for playing, and so we did, the young rats at least, as soon as we had finished eating. There were empty boxes for hide-and-seek, there were walls to climb, tin cans to roll, and pieces of twine to tie and swing on. There was even, in the middle of the square, a fountain to swim in when the weather was hot. Then, at the first clang of the cleanup men in the distance, one of the older rats would sound a warning, and everyone would pick up as much food as he could to carry home. All of us kept a reserve supply, because some days—Sundays and holidays—the market would be closed, and we were never quite sure when this would happen.

- 5 When I went to the market, it was usually with two companions, my older brother Gerald and a friend of ours named Jenner. These were my two closest friends; we liked the same games, the same jokes, the same topics of conversation—even the same kinds of food. I particularly admired Jenner, who was extremely quick and intelligent.
- 6 One evening in early fall Jenner and I set out for the marketplace. It must have been September, for the leaves were just turning yellow and some children were throwing a football in a vacant lot. Gerald had to stay home that night; he had caught a cold, and since the air was chilly, my mother thought he should not go out. So Jenner and I went without him. I remember we promised to bring him back some of his favorite food, beef liver, if we could find any.
- 7 We took our usual route to the market, not along the streets but through the narrow walkways between the buildings, mostly commercial warehouses and garages, that bordered the square. As we walked, we were joined by more rats; at that time of day they converged on the marketplace from all directions. When we reached the square, I noticed that there was a white truck of an odd, square shape parked on the street bordering it, perhaps a block away. I say I noticed it—I did not pay any particular attention to it, for trucks were common enough in that part of town; but if I had, I would have noticed that printed on each side of it were four small letters: NIMH. I would not have known what they were, of course, for at that time neither I nor any of the other rats knew how to read.
- 8 It was growing dark when we reached the market, but through the dusk we could see that there was an unusually large supply of food—a great mound of it—near the center of the square, away from the roofed-over portion. I suppose that should have served as a warning, but it didn't. I remember Jenner's saying, "They must have had a really busy day," and we ran joyfully toward the pile along with several dozen other rats.
- 9 Just as we reached the food it happened. All around us suddenly there was shouting. Bright, blinding searchlights flashed on, aimed at us and at the mound of food, so that when we tried to run away from it, we could not see where we were going. Between and behind the lights there were shadows moving swiftly, and as they came toward us I could see that they were men—men in white uniforms carrying nets, round nets with long handles.
- 10 "Look out!" cried Jenner. "They're trying to catch us." He darted in one direction, I in another, and I lost sight of him.



- 11 We all ran—straight toward the men with the nets. There was no other way to run; they had us encircled. The nets flailed down, scooped, flailed again. I suppose some rats made it through, slipping between the men and past the lights. I felt a swish—a net just missed me. I turned and ran back toward the mound, thinking I might hide myself in it. But then came another swish, and that time I felt the enveloping fibers fall over me. They entangled my legs, then my neck. I was lifted from the ground along with three other rats, and the net closed around us.

Reprinted with the permission of Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division from *MRS. FRISBY AND THE RATS OF NIMH* by Robert C. O'Brien. Copyright © 1971 Robert C. O'Brien; copyright renewed © 1999 Christopher Conly, Jane Leslie Conly, Kate Conly and Sarah Conly.