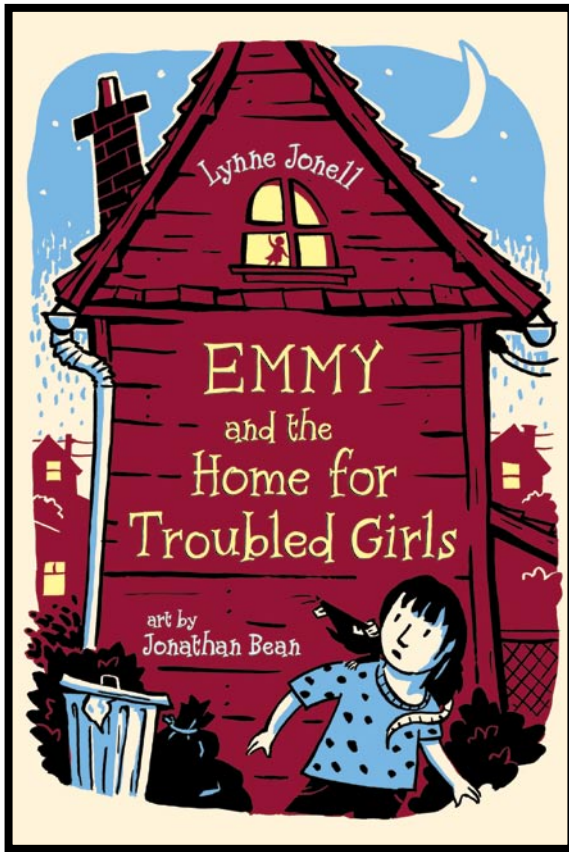


Emmy and the Home for Troubled Girls



Discussion Guide



Emma Addison is an ordinary girl—almost. If you don't count the fact that her parents are rich (very), her best friend is a boy (and a soccer star), and she can talk to rodents (and they talk back), she's very ordinary indeed. But she hasn't been that way for long . . .

It was only a few weeks ago that Emmy and her friends Ratty and Joe got rid of the evil Miss Barmy, the nanny who had nearly ruined Emmy's life—and the lives of five other girls who went missing. Miss Barmy is now a rat. How much harm can she do?

Discussion Questions

1. Like many middle school students, Emmy wants to be normal. Have students define "normal." Do they think it is really a bad thing to be viewed as the opposite? Who do students think determines what normal looks like?
2. Although Emmy thinks Joe has it easy, he has a few problems of his own, especially pressure from his father to play soccer all the time. Ask your students why Joe doesn't tell his father how he feels.
3. "Emmy peered inside all twenty-three Lego bins, and wished (not for the first time) that she didn't have so many toys. It was embarrassing when people came to visit; and when she tried to find something, it took forever" (page 10). Students should discuss why Emmy would be embarrassed by all the things she had. Can they come up with ideas for what she could do with all of the toys instead of keeping them, unused, in her playroom?
4. Discuss with your class why Miss Barmy's cane makes Emmy so uncomfortable while others find it very interesting and beautiful. Ask students if an object can be both repulsive and attractive at the same time. Can people appear both ways, depending on who is looking? Have your students ever seen something or known someone like that?
5. In chapter 2, Raston says that he "does not wish to wallow in ignorance." Yet poor Sissy "had spent years stuck in a cage with no opportunity to learn much of anything" (pg. 57). Have students discuss Raston and Sissy's feelings about their educations. Can they list ways he could help her?
6. Friends are very important. Emmy thinks that she can only be friends with humans and tries to avoid the creatures of Rodent City. How do students feel about this sentiment? Do they agree or disagree - can humans befriend animals? What about pets? Discuss with your class what makes someone a good friend. Does Emmy demonstrate how to be a good friend?
7. Emmy struggles with a feeling of guilt and hopelessness throughout the book. Have students list the situations that caused these feelings. Talk about why she feels so guilty. Could Emmy have avoided these feelings? How?

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8. Miss Barmy and Cheswick make an appearance at the party thrown in honor of Professor Capybara. They seem to have changed and the rodents accept them without hesitation. Mrs. Bunjee even proclaims, “Everyone deserves a second chance.... But people can’t switch from bad to good all at once, without a few false steps along the way. It’s our job to help and guide, not to criticize,” (p 115-116). Do your students believe that people can change that drastically? Can they think of someone who was terribly nasty and became a better person eventually? Have students come up with ways to help someone trying to change their nasty ways.

9. “Go on. You won’t get your wish if you don’t take the first step” (p 151). The wishing mouse’s encouraging words to Emmy signify that it might take more than making the wish for it to come true. Emmy, Thomas, Joe, and even Meg have wishes granted (whether they knew it was happening or not). Discuss with your students how the characters’ wishes are different. Have students choose a character and tell what they would have wished to happen.

10. The little girls – Ana, Berit, Lee, Lisa, and Merry, have had horrible lives. They had Miss Barmy as a nanny, their parents mysteriously died, and they now live in a shoe box in Mr. and Mrs. B’s attic. Ask students how they think it would feel to be trapped like the girls are. How do they take care of each other? Have students create a list of words to describe the girls.

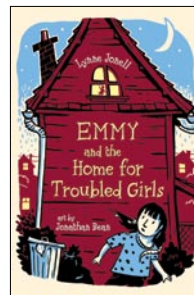
11. Using Professor Capybara’s charascope, Emmy and Thomas can see what characteristics make up a person. Miss Barmy is full of hatred, resentment, and probably a bit of fear. Thomas’s blood shows love, happiness, curiosity, wonder, courage, and hope. Emmy worries how her blood might appear, especially after she let Sissy get injured. Ask students if they think it is reasonable for her to worry. Discuss what characteristics Emmy might see in her own blood. How do they think Emmy’s blood sample would look at the end of the story? How would Emmy feel about the change?

12. Raston and Joe get very mad (and disappointed) at Emmy when they find out what she allowed to

happen to Sissy. They even say some pretty awful things to her. Do students think their response was fair? Have them defend why or why not.

13. Why do your students think Emmy was surprised by Meg’s response to her when Emmy was finally honest with her?

14. Emmy finally begins to act like a real friend, and rather bravely, after her mistakes are discovered by Joe and Raston. She sneaks into Rodent City to snoop on Miss Barmy, she interferes with Miss Barmy’s plans, and she rescues the little girls. Ask your students whether Emmy redeems herself for her mistakes. Connect their answers to question 7 and discuss whether she proves that she is a good friend.



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Written by Lynne Jonell
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October 2008
Grade Range: 4 and up
Age Range: 9 and up
ISBN: 978-0-8050-8151-0
ISBN-10: 0-8050-8151-8



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