

*The Tale of Despereaux:  
Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess,  
Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread*

by Kate DiCamillo

[Candlewick Press, 2003]

**Book Synopsis:** Our hero, an undersized mouse with big ears, marches to the beat of a different drummer. Unlike the rest of his family, Despereaux Tilling is an inquisitive romantic who loves books, adventure, music, and Princess Pea. This behavior is considered so aberrant that the Mouse Council condemns him to death and Despereaux is sent to the castle's dungeon. There he meets Roscuro, an unusual rat whose fascination with light is the reason the king has banned soup from the kingdom. Despereaux manages to return upstairs on a dinner tray and overhears miserable and mistreated Miggery Sow's plans to kidnap Princess Pea. With bravery and cunning, Despereaux saves the day. He and the princess become good friends and often eat soup in the banquet hall.

## Lesson I

### *Patterns and Problem Solving*

#### **Introduction:**

Despereaux Tilling is a small mouse who is an excellent problem solver. Students will emulate his problem solving skills as they create sentences based on the words in a very long subtitle.

Grade Level: 2-5      Time Allocation: 25-30 minutes

#### **Objectives:**

- The students, given a specific letter pattern, will create various sentences.
- The students will review proper sentence formation.
- The students will define the word subtitle.

#### **Materials:**

- Book- *The Tale of Despereaux*
- Visual- *The Tale of Despereaux* Patterns and Problem Solving
- Activity sheets- *The Tale of Despereaux* Patterns and Problem Solving
- (Optional) Dictionaries for student word search

#### **Procedure:**

1. Introduce the lesson by showing the students the spine of *The Tale of Despereaux*. Both the book's spine and title page reveal the book's subtitle; *Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread*.
2. Define subtitle as *a secondary title of a book or article that gives additional information about its content*. Ask the students why they think the author decided to include such a long subtitle.
3. Display the visual and read its contents to the students. Solicit suggestions for words and fill in the blanks. Possible sentences: Maybe others understand silly essays. Mr. Owens undercooked the squash and eggplant.
4. Distribute activity sheets. If possible, make dictionaries available to the students. Read the directions. Remind the students that a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a punctuation mark. Allow students to work in pairs or small groups.
5. Encourage students to share their sentences with the class. Expect some giggles and groans.

The Tale of Despereaux:  
Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread

*Patterns & Problem Solving*



M-O-U-S-E

These sentences contain words that all begin with the same letter pattern.

Mike often uses special equipment.

Mary O'Connor usually sleeps in the evening.

Make others understand spelling is easy.

Let's create a class M-O-U-S-E sentence!

M \_\_\_\_\_  
O \_\_\_\_\_  
U \_\_\_\_\_  
S \_\_\_\_\_  
E \_\_\_\_\_

Our Sentence is:

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The Tale of Despereaux:  
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*Patterns & Problem Solving*

These sentences contain words that all begin with the letter pattern: **P-R-I-N-C-E-S-S**

Put real ingredients in the next cake, especially the special spices.

Patty Rodgers is not coming to Estelle's special sleepover.

Pete ran in nine contests at Eastern High School on Saturday.

**Directions:** Create sentences by using each letter to start a new word. Remember to capitalize and punctuate correctly. Write at least two sentences for each letter pattern. Be prepared to share your work with the class.

S-O-U-P

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

S-P-O-O-L

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

T-H-R-E-A-D

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Lesson II

### *Despereaux's Word Staircase*

#### **Introduction:**

Climbing up dungeon stairs takes strength and balance. Solving a word puzzle takes good problem solving skills. Despereaux will need all of these abilities if he is going to save Princess Pea.

Grade Level: 2-5      Time Allocation: 20-25 minutes

#### **Objectives:**

- The students will participate in a problem solving activity.
- The students will rearrange and add letters to form words.

#### **Materials:**

- Book- *The Tale of Despereaux*
- Visual- Despereaux's Word Staircase
- Activity- Despereaux's Word Staircase

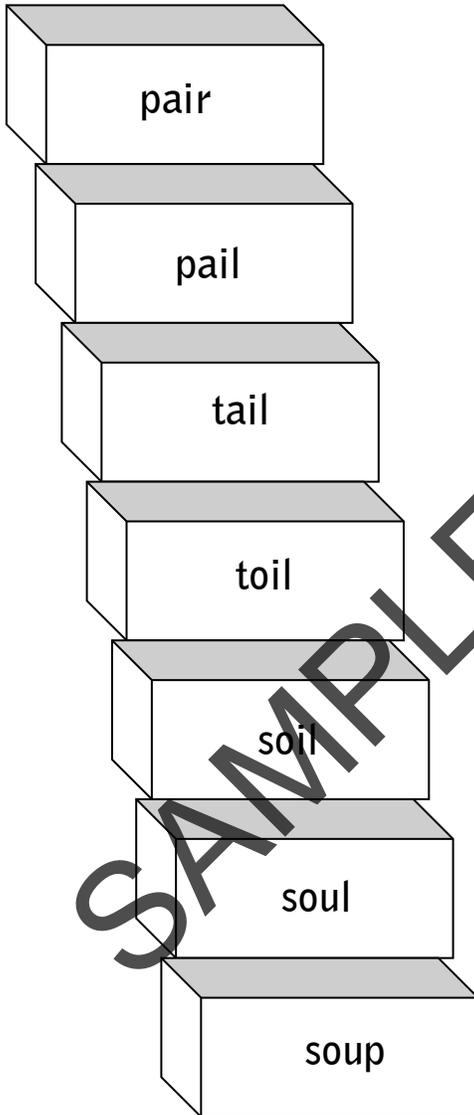
#### **Procedure:**

1. Introduce the lesson by showing the students Timothy Ering's illustration on the back of the book jacket of *The Tale of Despereaux*. Point out that it depicts the dungeon that imprisons Despereaux and Princess Pea. It is dark and gloomy. The stone staircase in the center of the illustration leads up to the castle and freedom.
2. Display the visual. Review the directions and example. Fill in the empty "staircase" using suggestions from the students. Possible solution: save-have-hate-gate-game-lame-lake.
3. Distribute the activity sheets. Students may work individually or in small groups. Remind students there are many possible combinations of words that will fill in the staircase.
4. Check for understanding. Possible solutions:  
#1 step-stop-shop-chop-chip-chin-thin  
#2 fall-fail-sail-said-sand-hand-hang  
#3 hope-home-some-same-fame-tame-time
5. Encourage students to share their solutions with the class.

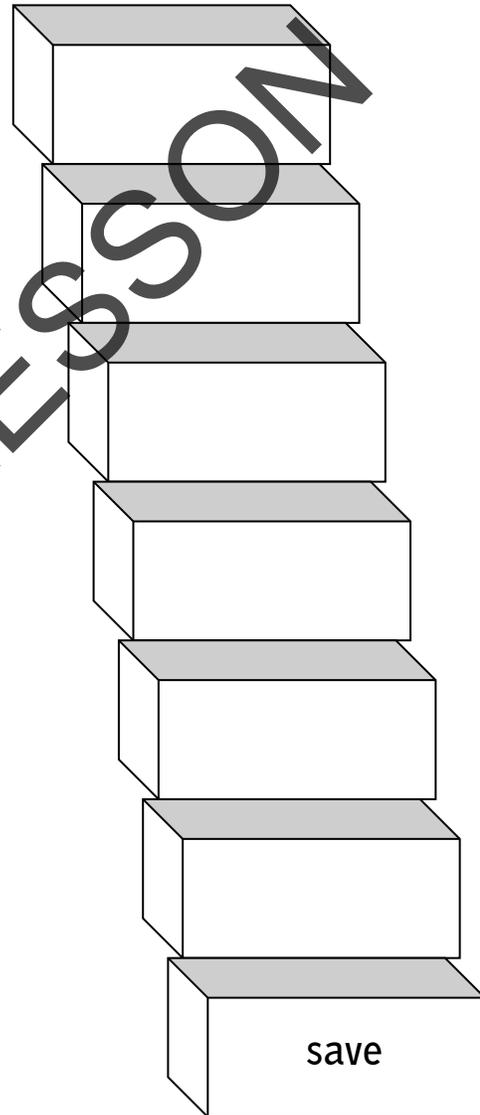
### *Despereaux's Word Staircase*

**Directions:** Begin with the word on the bottom step of the staircase. Change one letter to make a new word and write it on the next step. If you make it all the way to the top of the staircase, you leave the dungeon and enter the castle.

**Example:**

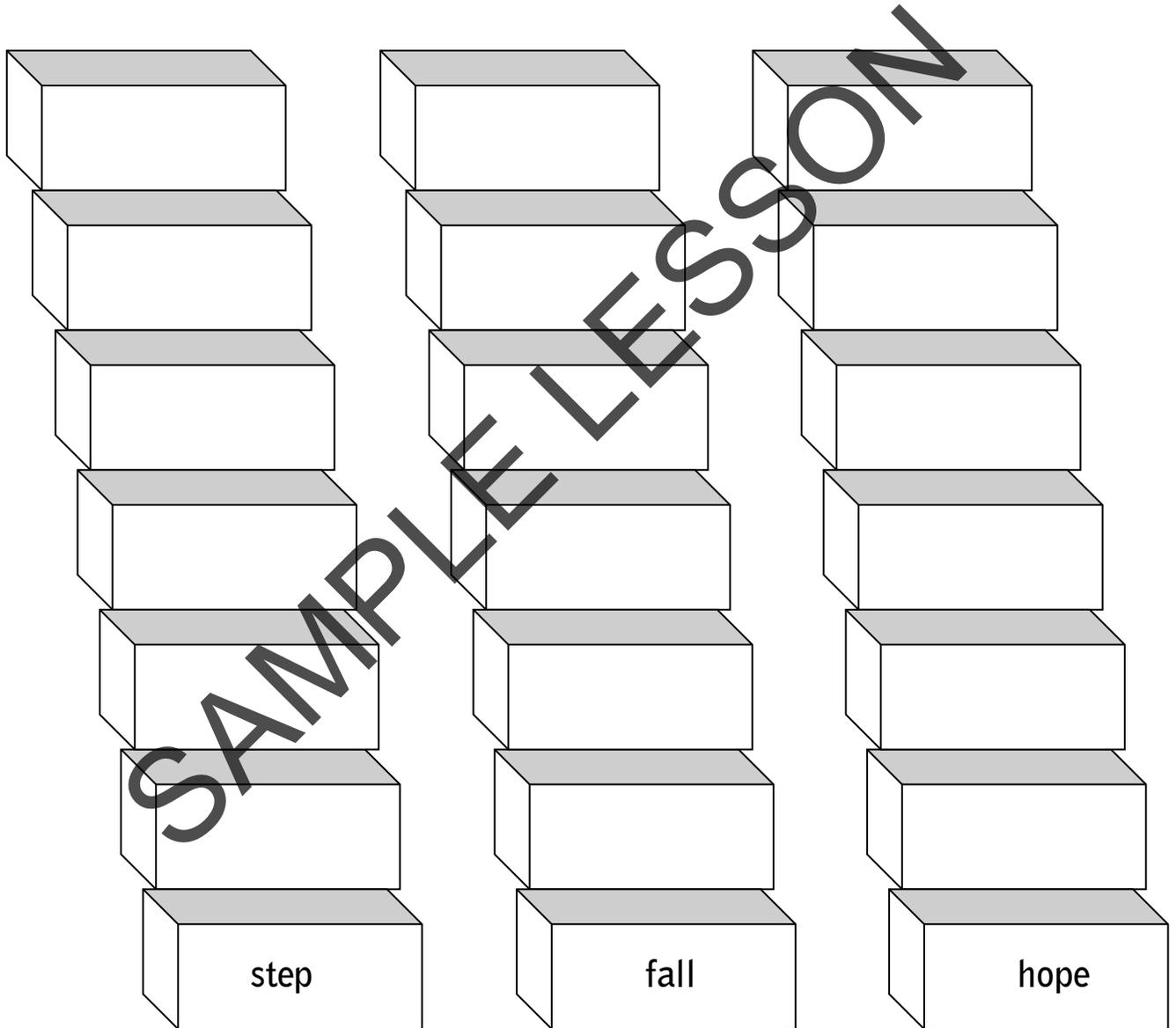


**Climb the Staircase:**



### *Despereaux's Word Staircase*

**Directions:** Begin with the word on the bottom step of the staircase. Change one letter to make a new word and write it on the next step. If you make it all the way to the top of the staircase, you leave the dungeon and enter the castle.



## Lesson III

### *Literary Rodents*

#### **Introduction:**

Despereaux Tilling is in good company. Some very entertaining books contain stories that include mice and rats as the main characters.

Grade Level: 3-5      Time Allocation: 15-20 minutes

#### **Objectives:**

- The students will be introduced to the literary term *personification* and identify its application in fictional characters.
- The students will use pre-knowledge and research skills to match a fictional character to a specific book title.

#### **Materials:**

- Book- *The Tale of Despereaux*
- Activity Sheet-Literary Rodents

#### **Procedure:**

1. Introduce the lesson by telling the students that the focus of this lesson is literary rodents. Display the illustration on page 23 of *The Tale of Despereaux*. This picture shows Despereaux reading a book and is captioned "*Once upon a time,*" *whispered Despereaux.*
2. Explain that the author, Kate DiCamillo, intentionally gave the animals in *The Tale of Despereaux* human qualities such as speech and the ability to read. This is a type of figurative language called personification. Define personification as a type of figurative language in which writers give animals and objects human-like characteristics.
3. Distribute activity sheets. Tell the students that there are many other books that feature mice and rats that have human-like characteristics. Allow students to work in pairs or small groups.
4. Check for understanding. Answers:
  1. B, 2. C, 3. A, 4. L, 5. H, 6. J, 7. G, 8. N, 9. K, 10. F, 11. M, 12. D, 12. I, 14. E.
5. Encourage students to look for these titles in the library.

### Literary Rodents



Directions: Match the rodent to the title.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| ___ 1. Angelina Mouseling        | A. <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i>         |
| ___ 2. Amos Mouse                | B. <i>Angelina Ballerina</i>                       |
| ___ 3. Dormouse                  | C. <i>Ben and Me</i>                               |
| ___ 4. Matthias & Abbot Mortimer | D. <i>Charlotte's Web</i>                          |
| ___ 5. Mouse Mino                | E. <i>The Cricket in Time Square</i>               |
| ___ 6. Poppy                     | F. <i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i> |
| ___ 7. Ralph S. Mouse            | G. <i>The Mouse and the Motorcycle</i>             |
| ___ 8. Ratty                     | H. <i>The Mouse with the Question Mark Tail</i>    |
| ___ 9. Reepicheep                | I. <i>Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH</i>         |
| ___ 10. Scabbers                 | J. <i>Poppy and Rye</i>                            |
| ___ 11. Stuart Little            | K. <i>Prince Caspian</i>                           |
| ___ 12. Templeton the Rat        | L. <i>Redwall</i>                                  |
| ___ 13. Timothy & Mr. Ages       | M. <i>Stuart Little</i>                            |
| ___ 14. Tucker Mouse             | N. <i>The Wind in the Willows</i>                  |

Extra Credit: Can you name the authors of the listed book titles?