

Little Rat Sets Sail

By Monika Bang-Campbell
Illustrated by Molly Bang

Harcourt, Inc.

A Reading and Discussion Guide

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SUMMARY:

Little Rat's parents have signed her up for sailing lessons. The problem – she's afraid. She's afraid of the water, afraid of falling in; she's afraid of getting hurt; she's afraid of the creatures who live in the water; she's also afraid that the other kids in her sailing class will find out she's a scaredy-cat. Will she learn to sail? Fortunately her sailing instructor is someone who can help her feel safe and, eventually, be brave.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

1. Ask the children if they've ever been afraid of something. Have a large piece of paper to make a list of their fears i.e., the dark, monsters, loud noises, etc.
2. Ask the children how they overcome their fears. How are they brave? Do they talk to a grown up, draw pictures, etc? Put these ideas on a second piece of paper. These visuals let children know that everyone is afraid of something and there are ways to learn to be brave.
3. Find out who has been sailing. What kind of boat? Did they like it?
4. At the beginning of chapter 4 there is a diagram of a boat with parts labeled. Go over the names with the kids. Some of them are may seem silly. An example would be that a sheet on a boat is not the same as a sheet on a bed. Kids can build their own boats. Each child will need a piece of styrofoam, a wood dowel, some string and either thin paper or cloth and follow the diagram in the book. The children should be able to float their boats.

5. One of Little Rat's fears is that the boat will tip over. As the children float their boats, talk about weight placement on a boat and what would happen if there is too much weight on one side. The boat will tip over if there is uneven weight displacement, so weight in a boat needs to be centered to keep it upright. In Little Rat's boat, there is a centerboard that helps keep her boat stable and prevents it from tipping.
6. Wind and clouds are a part of sailing. Find pictures of different cloud types and help children identify them. Take the kids outside and see if they can identify the clouds in the sky. Wind is what moves a sailboat. Wind is made when hot air and cold air change places. Have the children talk about wind and what kind of activities can be done when it's windy.
7. Little Rat is afraid of the creatures that live in the sea. Can the children identify the illustrations; how many can they name? Have the children make their own fish pillows and /or paper plate jelly fish. For the fish – trace and cut a large fish shape, each child needs two. Have the children color and decorate the fish. Staple the two shapes together and stuff with newspaper or plastic grocery bags until the fish is puffy. Staple the stuffing hole. For each jellyfish, color a paper plate with paint or markers. Fold the plate in half and, using a hole puncher, put a hole in the center of the plate. There are now 2 holes. String a long piece of yarn through the two holes and tie the ends together. Using a large garbage bag (white or clear is better than black), cut 18 strips about 1 ½” wide and 18” long. These are the jellyfish tentacles. Staple the tentacles around the underside of the plate.
8. Knots are a very important part of sailing. Probably the most important knot to learn is the bowline. To teach this knot, each child will need a length of rope about 24”. The following are directions for tying a bowline, though it might be easier to check out <http://www.netknots.com> or a basic knot tying book with diagrams. Make an overhand loop. Bring the ropes working end up through the loop, behind the standing part and back down into the loop. Pull up on the standing part while you also pull down on the loop and working end. Make sure there is plenty of rope tucked down through. (*Knots to Know*, Emily Stetson, 2002)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Excerpted from *Contemporary Authors Online*, Gale, 2005.
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Thomson Gale. 2005. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/BioRC>

A professional sailor, Monika Bang-Campbell joined her mother, well-known author and illustrator Molly Bang, in creating the chapter book *Little Rat Sets Sail*. Bang-Campbell drew on her extensive experience as a sailor to add authenticity to this children's book about the sport, while her mother provided the illustrations. ... Bang-Campbell told *Contemporary Authors*: "I have sailed on boats since I was little and have continued my sailing career into adulthood. I am a professional sailor aboard tall ships that run educational programs for students ranging from middle school to adults. I received my master's degree in clinical social work from Boston University. Integrating the art of traditional sail to an educational curriculum enhances the students' learning experience."

HELPFUL LINKS:

Visit http://www.harcourtbooks.com/authorinterviews/bookinterview_bang-campbell.asp to read an interview with Monika Bang-Campbell and Molly Bang

Molly Bang's website: <http://www.mollybang.com>



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