

This guide was prepared using the Farrar, Strauss and Giroux edition, ©1976. Other editions may differ.

Synopsis

Chapter 1

One summer day in 1907, newlywed mice Abel and Amanda are picnicking in the woods when they are caught in a sudden storm—a “full-fledged, screaming hurricane.” They take refuge in a cave with some other animals.

Chapter 2

A gust of wind scoops up Amanda’s scarf and Abel lunges from safety to retrieve it. Abel is swept up in a stream, then a river. Caught on a board, Abel is tossed and turned on the rapids. Suddenly he stops moving; clinging to his nail as the water and wind whipped around him.

Chapter 3

Abel sleeps for fourteen hours. When Abel awakens, he finds himself marooned on an island (about 12,000 tails long). He is sure that his rescue is imminent: “It’s certainly gotten around that Abelard Hassam di Chirico Flint, of the Mossville Flints, is missing,” the society mouse speculates.

Chapter 4

The next morning, Abel attempts to get to shore. He builds three different boats, but all fail.

Chapter 5

Abel forages for food, consuming everything from mulberries to roasted seeds. Filled with despair, Abel talks to his personal star.

Chapter 6

His third morning on the island, Abel makes a new home in a hollow log.

Chapter 7

Abel tries making a bridge of rope and when that fails, of stepping stones. That fails as well. By August, Abel realizes that he will be living on the island for quite some time, whether he likes it or not.

Chapter 8

In September, Abel tries making a catapult, but it fails as well. To his great delight, Abel makes fire. He also sends off rescue notes. He dreams of his beloved Amanda.

Chapter 9

Abel makes a glider, but it is also a disaster. Abel isn’t an everyday mouse; he’s a fastidious Edwardian dandy mouse whose inherited wealth ensures the upper-class comforts he enjoys. But Abel’s elegant life of leisure conceals a courageous heart: when faced with the necessity of surviving, Abel rises to the challenge. He stores wood for the winter and makes art, carving statues of his beloved Amanda and the rest of his family. In October, he discovers a watch and a book, *Sons and Daughters*, both of which delight him.

Chapter 10

Abel makes signs for his home in the log. An owl attacks, but Abel bravely frees himself.

Chapter 11

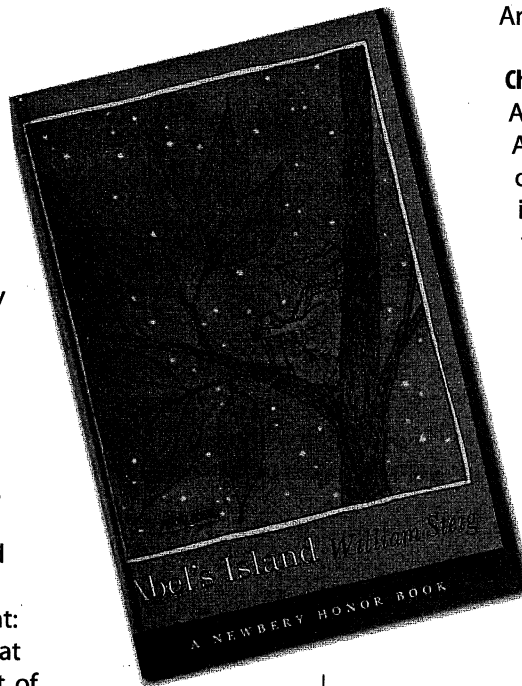
In November, Abel sets aside an abundant store for winter.

Chapter 12

In December, Abel begins talking to himself. The owl attacks again, but Abel fights him off with his spear. Abel has three owl feathers as a talisman against evil.

Chapter 13

Abel spends most of January, February, and March nestled in his log. The cold weather breaks and he is delighted, but it proves a false spring as winter tightens its grip. Abel is weak and sick in the bitter cold, but he survives.



Abel's Island William Steig

Chapter 14

The land begins to thaw in March and Abel feels himself coming back to life. Spring elates Abel as he immerses himself in the natural world and discovers his true nature. Abel is delighted to meet Gower Glackens, an old frog. They become friends.

Chapter 15

Abel makes a statue of Gower, which greatly pleases the frog. They share stories of their families.

Chapter 16

Abel is upset when Gower leaves in June to rejoin his family. He makes Gower promise to contact Amanda, but holds no hope because the frog is forgetful.

Chapter 17

To keep busy, Abel makes art. He aches for Amanda. He has been on the island for a full year. In the midst of a drought when the river is low, Abel decides to attempt swimming home.

Chapter 18

Abel reaches shore, but he is captured by a cat.

Chapter 19

The cat plays with Abel until Abel uses his superior intellect to outsmart the mouse. Abel frees himself and recognizes where he is—very close to home.

Chapter 20

Abel arrives in Grover Park and sees Amanda, but decides to return home and clean up first. Amanda comes home and the couple has a tearful reunion.

Timeline

1907	William Steig born <i>Abel's Island</i> is set during the Edwardian period San Francisco earthquake Upton Sinclair's <i>The Jungle</i> First electric washing machine	1912	Oreo cookies introduced The luxury ocean liner <i>Titanic</i> sinks.
1908	Ford Introduces the Model-T	1914-1918	World War I
1909	Plastic invented Robert Peary and Matthew Henson become the first explorers to reach the North Pole	1917	Russian Revolution
1910	Haley's Comet appears	1918	Influenza epidemic Daylight Saving Time introduced
1911	Chinese Revolution Roald Amundsen reaches the South Pole	1920	League of Nations established Female suffrage in U.S.
		1921	Irish Free State proclaimed
		1922	Tomb of King Tut discovered
		1923	Movies with sound invented
		1925	The Scopes (Monkey) Trial
		1927	Babe Ruth sets home-run record First talking movie, <i>The Jazz Singer</i> Lindbergh flies solo across the Atlantic Ocean
		1928	Bubble gum invented First <i>Mickey Mouse</i> cartoon Penicillin discovered
		1929	New York Stock Market crashes
		1930	Gandhi's Salt March The planet Pluto discovered Sliced bread first available
		1931	Al Capone imprisoned for income tax evasion Empire State Building completed
		1932	Air conditioning invented Amelia Earhardt becomes the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean
		1933	Loch Ness monster first spotted First Nazi concentration camp established
		1934	The Dust Bowl
		1936	Hoover Dam completed
		1937	Amelia Earhardt vanishes
		1939	First commercial flight over the Atlantic Ocean World War II begins
		1941	December 7: America enters World War II
		1948	State of Israel founded
		1950	Korean War begins

- 1952 Elizabeth II crowned Queen of England
Car seat belts introduced
Polio vaccine invented
- 1954 Supreme Court issues *Brown v. Board of Education*, making segregation illegal
- 1955 Disneyland opens
McDonald's corporation founded
- 1956 Sabin invents oral polio vaccine
- 1957 Dr. Seuss publishes *The Cat in the Hat*
- 1958 NASA established
- 1960 First televised US presidential debate
- 1961 Peace Corps founded
Berlin Wall built
Alan Shepard is first American in space
- 1963 President Kennedy assassinated
- 1967 First Super Bowl
First heart transplant
Six Day War in Middle East
- 1969 Neil Armstrong is the first human on the moon
- 1974 President Nixon resigns
- 1976 *Abel's Island* published
- 1979 Sony introduces the Walkman
- 1981 First woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court
Pac-man video game is very popular
- 1983 Sally Ride becomes first woman in space
- 1989 Berlin Wall taken down
- 1990 Nelson Mandela is freed in South Africa
- 1991 Collapse of Soviet Union
- 1997 Scientists clone sheep
China resumes control of Hong Kong
- 1999 World population reaches 6 billion
- 2001 Sept. 11: al-Qaeda terrorists destroy World Trade Center in New York City
- 2002 Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter wins Nobel Peace Prize
- 2003 William Steig dies

Author Sketch



William Steig was born in Brooklyn in 1907 of humble stock: his father was a housepainter and his mother, a seamstress. The Steigs were Socialists, which meant that certain career choices were not accepted in the household.

"My parents didn't want their sons to become laborers, because we'd be exploited by businessmen, and they didn't want us to become businessmen, because then we'd exploit the laborers," he told Anita Silvey for *Children's Books and Their Creators*. The arts seemed to be the path of choice, since they did not involve exploitation and both of Steig's parents had dabbled in them.

Steig stayed in New York City, attending City College from 1923 to 1925 and the National Academy of Design from 1925 to 1929. In 1930, the beginning of the Depression, Steig began his career as a freelance cartoonist. He had to earn a living quickly because his father, as with so many others, had lost his money in the Crash of 1929. Fortunately, Steig's cartoons were popular almost instantly and he was indeed able to support his family.

Steig didn't begin creating children's books until 1968—nearly forty years after he began his career as a cartoonist—but achieved immense prestige, winning the Caldecott Award and a National Book Award. Nonetheless, to the literati, Steig is most famous as a cartoonist whose works dominate the pages of the *New Yorker*; to the hoi poloi, his fame rests on the jaundiced ogre *Shrek*, whose adventures were adapted into an Academy Award-winning film in 2001.

Steig's children's books are cherished for their evocative language, imaginative plots, and delightful illustrations. "Like Isaac Bashevis Singer, E. B. White and a select company of others, Steig is a writer of children's books whose work reaches beyond the specific confines of a child audience," noted James E. Higgins in *Children's Literature in Education*.

"Working for kids is not the same as working for adults. Kids' books take a lot longer. I can do a drawing in 15 minutes. Once my editor, Michael di Capua, approves an idea for a children's book, it takes me about a week to write it and a month to do the illustrations," Steig noted.

Steig married four times and was divorced from his first three wives. He died in 2003.

Critic's Corner

Steig's awards are almost too numerous to list, but include the Caldecott Medal, the Christopher Award, the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, and the Hans Christian Andersen Medal. Steig received the 1970 Caldecott Medal for *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*. His next four books—*Amos and Boris*, *Dominic*, *The Real Thief*, and *Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride*—were all named ALA Notable Books, and *Dominic* received the 1975 William Allen White Children's Book Award.

Abel's Island was named a *New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year (1976); and a Newbery Honor Book, Children's Book Showcase title, ALA Notable Book designation, Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, and *Boston Globe-Horn Book* honor, all in 1977.

George A. Woods' review of *Abel's Island* in the *New York Times* was characteristic of the praise the book received: "There was no trouble in locating the best book of the year, William Steig's *Abel's Island* ... Abelard is, one hopes, all of us—proud, resourceful, despairing, persevering and, eventually, triumphant. And so is Mr. Steig triumphant in the quality of his prose—nor has he stinted on the quality and quantity of his illustrations." *School Library Journal* echoed this praise: "Abel's adventures are presented with Steig's usual grace, warmth, and insight, and the delights of the text are further enhanced by his drawings. On all counts, it's a winner."

Other Works by William Steig

Cartoons

Man about Town (1932)
About People: A Book of Symbolical Drawings (1939)
The Lonely Ones (1942)
Small Fry (1944)
Persistent Faces (1945)
Till Death Do Us Part: Some Ballet Notes on Marriage (1947)
The Agony in the Kindergarten (1950)
The Rejected Lovers (1951)
The Steig Album: Seven Complete Books (1953)
Dreams of Glory, and Other Drawings (1953)
Continuous Performances (1963)
Male/Female (1971)
William Steig: Drawings (1979)
Ruminations (1984)
Spinky Sulks (1988)
Our Miserable Life (1990)

Self-illustrated Books for Children

C D B! (1968, revised 2000)
Roland the Minstrel Pig (1968)
Sylvester and the Magic Pebble (1969)
The Bad Island (1969, revised edition; 1984)
An Eye for Elephants (1970)
The Bad Speller (1970)
Amos and Boris (1971)
Dominic (1972)
The Real Thief (1973)
Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride (1974)
The Amazing Bone (1976)
Caleb and Kate (1977)
Tiffky Doofky (1978)
Gorky Rises (1980)
Doctor De Soto (1982)
Yellow and Pink (1984; reprinted, 2003)
C D C? (1984; reprinted, 2003)
Solomon the Rusty Nail (1984)
Brave Irene (1986)
The Zabajaba Jungle (1987)
Alpha Beta Chowder (1992)
Doctor De Soto Goes to Africa (1992)
Sunburst (1992)
Shrek!, (1993)
Pete's a Pizza (1998)
Little Simon (1995)

Other

Zeke Pippin (1994)
Collected Drawings (1994)
Grown-Ups Get to Do All the Driving (1995)
The Toy Brother (1996)
Toby, Where Are You? (1997)
(Illustrator) *A Handful of Beans: Six Fairy Tales*, by Jeanne Steig (1998)
(Illustrator) *Arthur Yorink's The Flying Latke* (1999)
Wizzil (2000)
Made for Each Other (2000)
(Illustrator) *A Gift from Zeus: Sixteen Favorite Myths*, by Jeanne Steig (2001)
Potch & Polly (2001)
Sick of Each Other (2001)
Which Would You Rather Be? (2002)
When Everybody Wore a Hat (2003)
Illustrator of numerous other books

Bibliography

Books

Children's Literature Review. Gale (Detroit, MI), Volume 2, 1976, pp. 158-161; Volume 15, 1988, pp. 175-202.

- Dictionary of Literary Biography. Volume 61: American Writers for Children since 1960: Poets, Illustrators, and Nonfiction Authors*, (Detroit, MI), 1987, pp. 297-305.
- Fisher, Margery, *Who's Who in Children's Books: A Treasury of the Familiar Characters of Childhood*. Holt, 1975.
- Kingman, Lee, editor. *Newbery and Caldecott Medal Books: 1966-1975. Horn Book*, 1975.
- Lorenz, Lee, *The World of William Steig*. Artisan, 1998.
- Lanes, Selma G., *Down the Rabbit Hole: Adventures and Misadventures in the Realm of Children's Literature*. Atheneum, 1971.
- Silvey, Anita, *Children's Books and Their Creators*. Houghton Mifflin, 1995.
- Steig, William, *The Amazing Bone*. Farrar, Straus and Grioux, 1976.
- Townsend, John Rowe. *Written for Children: An Outline of English-Language Children's Literature*, revised edition. Lippincott, 1974.

Periodicals

- Children's Book Review*, June, 1973; summer, 1975.
- Children's Books*, July-August, 1968; December, 1968; November, 1970; April, 1975.
- Children's Literature in Education*, spring, 1978, pp. 3-16.
- Christian Science Monitor*, November 11, 1971.
- Hartford Courant*, September 8, 1974.
- Independent* (London, England), October 7, 2003, p. 16.
- Junior Bookshelf*, February, 1972; February, 1973; April, 1973; August, 1973; June, 1975.
- Life*, December 17, 1971.
- Los Angeles Times Book Review*, December 5, 1982.
- Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2003, p. B16.
- New York*, December 16, 1974.
- New York Times Book Review*, April 21, 1968; February 16, 1969; October 19, 1969; October 17, 1971; July 9, 1972; September 2, 1973; November 10, 1974; July 18, 1976; November 14, 1976; November 13, 1977; November 25, 1979; December 12, 1982; August 12, 1984; November 9, 1986; June 28, 1987, p. 26.
- New York Times*, November 29, 1997, Sarah Boxer, "Wry Child of the Unconscious."
- New Yorker*, December 2, 1974. *New York Times*, October 6, 2003, p. A17.
- People*, December 3, 1984, Joshua Hammer, "With Pen, Ink and the Eye of an Innocent, a Brilliantly Off-Center Writer/ Cartoonist Refuses to Surrender to Age," pp. 87-98.
- Saturday Review/World*, December 4, 1973.
- Times Literary Supplement*, September 12, 1980.
- Times* (London, England), October 8, 2003.
- Washington Post*, October 6, 2003, p. B5.
- Washington Post Book World*, May 11, 1980.
- Weekly Book Review*, July 23, 1944.

General Objectives

1. To understand the book's title
2. To visualize Abel's island
3. To trace how Abel attempts to escape
4. To see how Abel survives
5. To appreciate the clever shelter Abel creates
6. To understand the theme of appearance and reality
7. To probe the relationship between Abel and Gower
8. To see how Abel defends himself against threats
9. To connect the illustrations to the text
10. To determine the book's theme

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the relationship between Abel and Amanda, focusing on their mutual devotion
2. To understand why Abel lunges after Amanda's scarf
3. To trace how Abel comes to be marooned on the island
4. To understand that Abel's dandified exterior hides a courageous, determined character
5. To list the foods that Abel gathers and eats
6. To appreciate how Abel fights off the owl
7. To comprehend how Abel prepares for the winter and survives the freezing cold
8. To determine what art, especially sculpture and drawing, means to Abel
9. To appreciate how Abel takes his fate into his own hands and gets off the island
10. To discuss how Abel has changed as a result of his year on the island

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of William Steig's style, present the following terms and applications to the book:

humor parts of a story that are funny. *Abel's Island* is a delight to read in part because of its dry wit. For instance, on page 89, Gower says to Abel: "I wish I could carry you off the island...but I'll have enough trouble making it by myself. I'm not what I was in my mating days." The art is also amusing, largely because of the detail and the subtle expressions on the characters' faces. The art on the frontispiece, for instance, shows Abel as an Edwardian dandy. In this illustration, Steig

creates humor by dressing the mouse in a straw boater, natty morning coat, and spats. Abel even has a pocket watch, cane, and medal on his lapel. His smug face completes the delightful portrait of an elegant upper-class mouse who has no clue that his entire life is about to be turned upside-down.

characterization the different ways that an author tells readers about characters. Writers can tell about characters directly or let readers reach their own decisions about a character indirectly by showing the comments, thoughts, and actions of the other characters. Steig uses indirect characterization to develop Abel into a fully-rounded "person." On page 8, we see that Abel is both impulsive and brave as he dashes into the storm to retrieve Amanda's scarf; on page 86, we see that Abel has a bit of snobbery, when he introduces himself by his full name: Abelard Hassam di Chirico Flint.

visuels Steig is celebrated for his sophisticated, witty cartoons and mastery of line and form: *Newsweek* called him "The King of Cartoon." These skills are clearly evident in the amusing, eloquent sketches that illustrate the novel. They not only help readers visualize the characters and action but also appreciate Abel's transformation from an effete dandy to a brave action hero.

The Importance of Setting

The island setting is central to the novel, of course, because it determines Abel's day-to-day existence, tests his ability to survive, and hones his character. The island setting determines what he eats, what he reads, how he spends his days as well.

But Abel isn't just a mouse. He's also an Edwardian dandy whose lavish inherited income ensures the upper-class life he adores. While *Abel's Island* takes place almost exclusively on an unnamed island, the flavor of the Edwardian period runs through it.

The Edwardian period in the United Kingdom took place from 1901 to 1910, the reign of King Edward VII. It succeeded the Victorian period. Perhaps because of the King's fondness for travel, the period was marked by an enthusiasm for the art and fashions of continental Europe.

During Edwardian era, the British class system was at its most rigid. The upper classes embraced leisure sports, which led to rapid developments in fashion, as more mobile and flexible clothing styles were needed. The Edwardian Period was also known as the Belle Epoque,

the "beautiful era." Despite the relatively short duration of the period, it is characterized by its own architectural style, fashion of dress, and even way of life. Art Nouveau was a major influence on everyday life.

Cross-Curricular Sources

Fiction

Avi, *Poppy*
Stephanie Calmenson, *The Frog Principal*
Miriam Cohen, *Will I Have a Friend?*
Doreen Cronin, *Diary of a Spider*
Daniel DeFoe, *Robinson Crusoe*
Kate DiCamillo, *The Tale of Despereaux*
Karen Hesse, *Come on Rain*
Russell Hoban, *The Mouse and Child*
Derek Munson, *Enemy Pie*
Robert O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh*
Gary Paulsen, *Hatchet*
Gary Paulsen, *Brian's Winter*
Nikolai Popov, *Why?*
Cynthia Rylant, *The Old Woman Who Named Things*
E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*
E.B. White, *The Trumpet of the Swan*
E.B. White, *Stuart Little*
Jane Yolen, *Commander Toad and the Intergalactic Spy*
Jane Yolen, *Commander Toad in Space*

DVDs, Videos

The Adventures of Milo and Otis
Air Bud
Babe
The Bear
That Darn Cat
Free Willy
Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey
Iron Will
Mouse Hunt
Shiloh
Shrek!

Many of Steig's books have been adapted as filmstrips: *Amos and Boris*, 1975; *Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride*, 1976; and *Brave Irene*, 1988.

Adapted for film:

Doctor De Soto, 1985; *The Amazing Bone*, 1985; *Abel's Island*, 1988; and *Brave Irene*, 1989.

Doctor De Soto and Other Stories was adapted for read-along-cassette, 1985.

Shrek! was adapted as an animated feature film (2001)

Internet

William Steig's Web site

<http://www.williamsteig.com/>

About William Steig

www.williamsteig.com/williamsteig.htm

Kidsreads.com - William Steig

www.kidsreads.com/authors/au-steig-william.asp

William Steig: HarperCollins Publishers

www.harpercollinschildrens.com/HarperChildrens/

William Steig - Wikipedia

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Steig

Features: William Steig Illustration

www.salon.com/16dec1995/features/kids5.html

William Steig bio

www.hbook.com/exhibit/steigbio.html

Boston Globe: John Koch, author interview.

<http://www.boston.com/globe/> (June 22, 1997)

Themes and Motifs

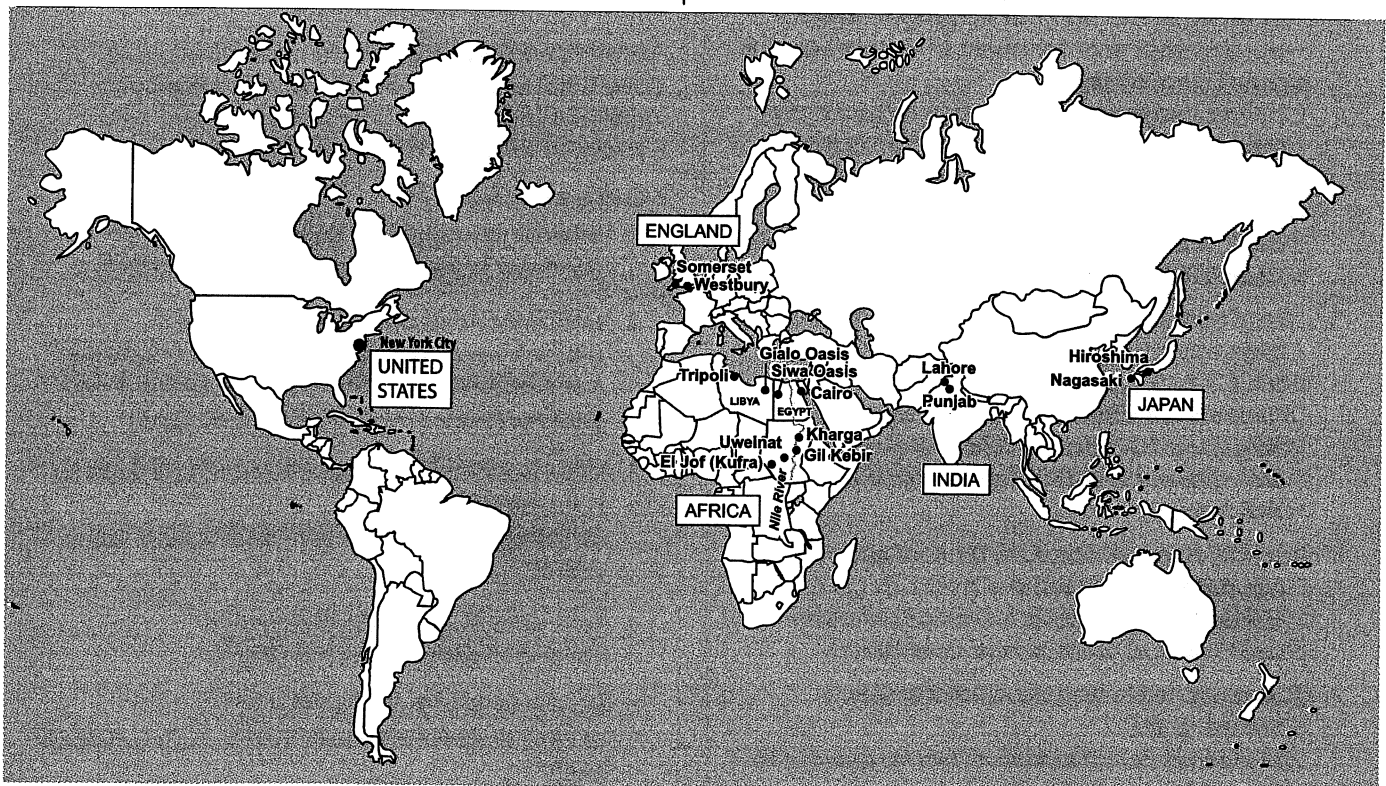
A study of the central issues and situations in William Steig's *Abel's Island* should include these aspects:

Themes

- art
- change
- despair
- elation
- hurricanes
- island
- marriage
- love
- survival
- winter

Motifs

- loving your spouse and sharing interests
- living a privileged life
- surviving a hurricane and a near-drowning
- being marooned on an island
- undergoing significant changes
- feeling great despair
- being elated during spring's splendor
- struggling to survive
- creating art
- appreciating witty and clever artwork



Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Chapter and page numbers are included. Explain the meaning of each.

1. He dashed out impulsively. (Chap. 2, p. 8)
(This is the inciting incident in the novel, the event that sets the plot into motion. Abel dashes out to retrieve his wife's scarf, a stereotypically romantic and useless gesture. By the end of the novel, readers see the steel under Abel's soft romantic exterior.)
2. There was no doubt that he was on an island. (Chap. 3, p.14)
(Recall that Abel is a mouse, a tiny creature not noted for its endurance or ability to swim long distances. Further, Abel appears to be an effete dandy who has no practical training. In fact, he has never even held a job. Nonetheless, he not only survives but also manages to flourish.)
3. The state of his clothes disturbed him. Damp and lumpy, they no longer had style. (Chap. 3, p. 14).
(Abel has no food or shelter. He is cut off from civilization; he is a tiny creature. He is the food of many predators who live on islands, such as owls. Nonetheless, he is upset that his clothes lack style. This scene shows what a shallow and foolish fellow he is at first and helps readers understand his transformation into a thoughtful and self-sufficient person by the end of the book.)
4. By the end of the month of August he knew he was an inhabitant of the island, whether he liked it or not. (Chap. 7, p. 42).
(Abel has shown great ingenuity in trying to escape from the island, but now he – and readers—realize that he is indeed trapped. The book takes a different turn as Abel makes the best of his situation. That he copes so well shows another side to his character: he is no longer the dandy. Now he is capable and willing to get his hands dirty.)
5. Near the lower end, by the eastern shore, he found a huge watch with a chain, and an enormous book. (Chap. 9, p. 56)
(These two objects represent civilization: the importance of tracking time and the primacy of literature. They serve as a link to Abel's old way of life and thus help him to go on even when he feels despair.)
6. In a fit of fear and rage, Abel thrust again and again, desperately, without plan. (Chap. 12, p. 71)
(Abel is acting on instinct, but he is nonetheless very courageous. This shows his true character: brave and heroic.)
7. At times he felt he had no need of others. (Chap. 14, p. 85)
(Abel, previously the most social of creatures, has come to value

his solitude. Abel, previously an indoor creature who liked to read, now spends his days glorying in nature. This scene shows another significant way that he has changed.)

8. "I think you've found your vocation," opined Gower. (Chap.15, p. 93)
(Abel is pleased and surprised that his art is that good, because he had never thought of having a vocation, much less a job or a career. Again, we see how drastically he has changed in less than a year.)
9. If he remembered his family, that was because a family is the one thing nobody can ever forget. (Chap.17, p. 100)
(Abel has changed from being an effete, dandified fellow into an active survivalist and artist. Nonetheless, Amanda and his family remain at the center of his life. This is one way that he has not and will not change. This quote shows one of Steig's main themes: the importance of family, especially in hard times.)
10. When he was able to speak, Abel said, "I've brought you back your scarf." (Chap. 20, p. 117)
(Steig ends the novel on a light and amusing note, which further adds to the book's charm. A master stylist, Steig resisted the impulse to include an exclamation point, realizing that it would over-emphasize the humor and spoil its subtle effect.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where does the story take place?
(The story is set primarily on an island from 1907-1908.)
2. How does Abel come to be marooned?
(His wife's scarf blows into the wind from the cave where they have taken shelter during a hurricane. He impulsively chases it, gets swept away in a river, and ends up on the island.)
3. What does Abel do to keep himself busy while he is marooned?
(He gathers food, makes art, explores, reads, and plots ways to escape.)
4. Who does Abel meet in the spring?
(He meets an elderly frog, Gower Glackens.)
5. How does Abel finally get home?
(During a drought when the water is low, he swims to the mainland.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. What do the watch and book symbolize?
(They represent civilization and culture.)
7. Why do you think Steig included the incident with the cat?
(The incident adds suspense.)
8. How has Abel changed as a result of his experiences?
(He has always been brave and resourceful, but never had a chance to show these qualities. Now, however, these qualities come to the forefront. Perhaps his greatest change is realizing how much he likes art and how good he is at it. Abel has found his life's vocation.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What did you like the most about the line drawings?
(Possible answer: Their wit and interesting details.)
10. Do you think Abel should have rushed into Amanda's arms in the park or cleaned up first, as he chose? Explain your answer.
(Students who like the ending might comment that it adds suspense and helps cushion the shock of Abel's return; those who did not like it can argue that he should have gone for the more dramatic public reunion.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Theorize how the book would have been different if Abel had not gotten himself off the island.
12. Write a new title for the book.

Across the Curriculum

Language Arts

1. Steig wrote the award-winning movie *Shrek!*, whose name means "fear" in Yiddish. Compile a glossary of ten other Yiddish words commonly used.
2. A critic wrote: "Positive themes reoccur throughout Steig's works: the abundant world of nature, the security of home and family, the importance of friendship, the strength that comes from self-reliance." Agree or disagree with this assessment.
3. Imagine that Abel had been marooned on a tropical island rather than a temperate one. Summarize how the novel would be the same and different in this new setting.

4. Another critic believes: "Many of Steig's picture books incorporate wish-fulfillment childhood fantasies." What fantasy might *Abel's Island* represent?
5. Though terrifying, change is finally beneficial, Steig seems to imply. How does Abel change? In an essay, explain how he changes and decide whether the changes are good or bad.
6. Imagine that you were marooned on an island for a year. Choose five books to take with you. Explain your choices.
7. Abel sends notes to Amanda, telling her what he is doing and how he can be rescued. Suppose that you were in Abel's place. Write some of these notes. See page 46 for models.

Art

1. Amanda and Abel have a picnic. Have a picnic with some of your friends!
2. Create a new picture for this book. Illustrate a scene that you especially liked, one that Steig did not draw.
3. Draw the clothing that a middle-class teenage girl and a middle-class teenage boy would have worn in England around 1907.
4. Imagine that Abel was a different animal, such as a cat or a dog. Choose one of the pictures in the book and redraw it with this new animal.
5. Design Amanda's scarf.
6. Make a life-size statue of someone whom you cherish.
7. Make a sign for your house, as Abel does for his.

History/Social Studies

1. *Abel's Island* is set from 1907 to 1908. This was the Edwardian era in England, 1901-1910, the reign of King Edward VII. Explain how Abel is characteristic of an upper-class person of that era.
2. Report on the key events in America from 1901-1910.
3. What other fictional characters have been marooned? Consider Swift's *Gulliver* or Defoe's *Crusoe*. Read one of these books (or any other book featuring a similar character) and determine how his or her experiences compare to Abel's experiences.

4. People get marooned while hiking, camping, and climbing. Find out how the authorities deal with these problems. For instance, who bears the cost of the rescue?
5. Abel is an adorable rodent, but few rodents are as educated, well-dressed, and admirable. Report on diseases that rodents can carry, such as the plague.
6. Abel finds the fire he makes as magical as the fires first made by ancient people. Find out how fire changed life for prehistoric people. Why was it so important?

Speech/Drama

1. Abel and Amanda play croquet. Find out how this game is played. If possible, demonstrate the game for the class.
2. When the cat goes after Abel, Abel decides to act the part of the mouse and so outwits the cat. Perform a "cat and mouse" scene with a friend.
3. Watch *Shrek!*, Steig's celebrated 2001 movie. In a brief speech, explain how it is similar to *Abel's Island*.
4. Working with some friends, debate whether or not the novel is realistic.
5. In a roundtable discussion, decide what people would need to do to survive for a year alone on an island.

Mathematics

1. Abel puts away food for the winter. Calculate how much your family spends for food in a three month period.
2. Make a chart showing the amount of snow that falls in your region during the winter.
3. The novel is set in 1907. Calculate how long ago it takes place.

Science

1. Abel eats many different things. Find out what mice really eat and how to keep mice out of your house.
2. Abel makes friends with a frog. Teach the class how frogs and toads are the same and different, using models.
3. Abel tries to make a glider, but it fails. Explain how

gliders work. Make a model glider to demonstrate how they are able to fly.

4. Explain what causes hurricanes. Show your findings on a chart or Powerpoint demonstration.
5. Abel spends an entire year on the island and experiences dramatic climate changes. Create a chart showing the climate in your region for a year. Include the average temperatures and amount of precipitation.

Health

1. Make an emergency kit to help your family during a hurricane. Go online to your local or state government emergency preparedness center to find out what to include.
2. Abel and Amanda eat "pot cheese" and "watercress." Explain what these foods are. Try to bring in some samples to share with your classmates.
3. Imagine that you were in Abel's place, marooned on an island for a year. List at least ten foods that you could find on an island in the temperate zone and safely eat.
4. After the crash, Abel sleeps for fourteen hours. Record how much you sleep every night for a week. Are you getting the recommended amount of sleep for someone your age—about 9 hours a night? If not, what can you do to adjust your schedule?

Alternate Assessment

1. Construct Gower Glackens' backstory. Explain how he came to be on the island and what his family life is like.
2. Work with some friends to recast this book for preschoolers who read a sentence or two per page.
3. Read another book by William Steig. Compare and contrast it to *Abel's Island*. Which one did you prefer and why?
4. Choose a dramatic chapter and perform it as a readers' theater with some of your classmates.

Vocabulary

Complete the chart by writing synonyms and antonyms for each of the following words from *Abel's Island*. Write as many words as you can for each entry. The first one is done for you.

Story Word
turbulent

Synonyms
agitated, violent, untamed

Antonyms
calm, placid, tranquil

1. drenched _____
2. smug _____
3. mundane _____
4. frantic _____
5. fiend _____
6. dismay _____
7. fickle _____
8. aloof _____
9. haven _____
10. decorum _____

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ___ 1. Abelard Hassam di Chirico Flint | A. Abel's natural enemy |
| ___ 2. William Steig | B. a mouse marooned on an island |
| ___ 3. Amanda | C. tree |
| ___ 4. the owl | D. an aged frog |
| ___ 5. Gower Glackens | E. Grover Park |
| ___ 6. the cat | F. the creature who captures Abel on the island |
| ___ 7. Abel's shelter on the island | G. cave |
| ___ 8. where Abel first sees Amanda after he returns | H. the author |
| ___ 9. where the cat chases Abel | I. log |
| ___ 10. Abel and Amanda's shelter during the hurricane | J. Abel's beloved wife |

Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. statues
2. Amanda's scarf
3. three owl feathers
4. watch
5. *Sons and Daughters*

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if a part is false.

- ___ 1. The novel opens during the summer of 1907.
- ___ 2. Abel is rushing down the rapids when he is flung against a rock and knocked unconscious.
- ___ 3. Abel is rescued by a kindly hedgehog, who takes him to an island.
- ___ 4. On the island, Abel builds three different boats, but they all fail.
- ___ 5. Abel talks to his personal star in the night sky, which soothes him.
- ___ 6. Abel tries making a bridge of rope and when that fails, a bridge of stepping stones. That fails as well.
- ___ 7. Abel makes a catapult, which finally succeeds.
- ___ 8. Abel finds plenty of food to eat, including lots of nuts and berries.
- ___ 9. Abel has spent five years on the island.
- ___ 10. Amanda has remarried and does not want to see Abel when he returns home.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. A critic claims: "Many of the animal characters inhabiting Steig's sunlit world also possess 'heroic' qualities; quests, whether in the form of a search for a loved one or for adventure's sake alone, are frequently undertaken." Agree or disagree with this statement, drawing examples from *Abel's Island*.
2. Explain how Abel changes as a result of his experiences on the island.
3. Theorize how Abel's life will be different back in civilization.
4. Describe Steig's theme or message about life in this novel.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

Choose the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. The book takes place in **(1907, 1970)**.
2. When the novel starts, Abel and Amanda have gone **(to a Grover Park concert, on a picnic)**.
3. Then they play a happy game of **(croquet, tennis)**.
4. Abel brings Amanda a **(hamburger, daisy)**.
5. When it starts to storm, Abel and Amanda run to a nearby **(store, cave)**.
6. Abel gets tossed into the roaring water when he foolishly chases Amanda's **(hat, scarf)**.
7. Filled with despair, Abel talks to his personal **(tree, star)**.
8. Abel has never worked a day in his life because he is **(rich, lazy)**.
9. Abel is attacked by **(an owl, a lion)**, but bravely frees himself.
10. Abel knows it is spring when he sees a **(crocus, crow)**.

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if a part is false.

1. Abel and Amanda are newlyweds.
2. At first, Abel is sure that he is going to be rescued very soon.
3. Abel busies himself with finding ways to get to shore. He builds six different boats, but they all fail.
4. His third morning on the island, Abel makes a new home in a hollow log.
5. Abel makes a bridge of stones, logs, and leaves. It is a partial success.
6. Abel never comes to accept that he will have to spend the winter on the island and he does not prepare for the winter.
7. Abel discovers a book called *Sons and Daughters*, which he reads.
8. Abel is delighted to meet Gower Glackens, a raccoon. They become friends.
9. Abel arrives in Grover Park and sees Amanda, but decides to return home and clean up first.
10. Amanda is not happy to see Abel because she has moved on with her life.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. spring
2. cat
3. Abel's clothing
4. a watch
5. statues

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Does Abel change or does he remain the same? Argue this issue in an essay.
2. Explain what art means to Abel. What does it represent in the novel?
3. Imagine that you were marooned on an island. What would you do the same as Abel? What would you do differently?
4. Describe what Amanda's scarf, the book, and the watch symbolize or represent in the novel.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

Story Word	Synonyms	Antonyms
1. drenched	wet, flooded, saturated	dry, arid
2. smug	self-satisfied, conceited	modest
3. mundane	everyday	special
4. frantic	frenzied, raging	calm, collected
5. fiend	demon, monster	friend
6. dismay	fright, alarm, worry	hearten, encourage
7. fickle	inconstant, changeable	steadfast
8. aloof	distant, remote	friendly
9. haven	refuge, shelter, sanctuary	dangerous place
10. decorum	propriety, good manners	rudeness

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. A |
| 2. H | 7. I |
| 3. J | 8. E |
| 4. F | 9. C |
| 5. D | 10. G |

Part II: Identification (20 points)

- Abel makes statues of the people he loves, beginning with Amanda. They represent art, and show how Abel has found his vocation in life.
- Amanda's scarf sets off the action and concludes it. Thus, it serves as a unifying force. It is also a potent symbol of love and loyalty.
- Abel takes three of the owl's feathers, which he uses as a magic totem. He curses them to bring evil to the owl, which shows how Abel is reverting to a more primitive state.
- Abel finds a watch, which he winds and uses to track time. It is a link to civilization and helps him maintain his sanity and focus.
- Sons and Daughters* is the novel that Abel finds the same time that he finds the watch. It, too, is a link to civilization, the world of literature and culture. It also helps him pass the time, as he reads it.

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

- | | |
|------------|-------------------|
| 1. 1907 | 6. Amanda's scarf |
| 2. picnic | 7. star |
| 3. croquet | 8. rich |
| 4. daisy | 9. an owl |
| 5. cave | 10. crocus |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. F |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

- Spring elates Abel as never before. He reels with sensory pleasure and feels reborn.
- Just when readers think that Abel is safe, he is caught by a cat. Abel frees himself through his wits. This incident adds to the novel's suspense and draws out the climax.
- Clothes help readers trace the changes in Abel's character. When he is first marooned on the island, the narrator comments: "The state of his clothes disturbed him. Damp and lumpy, they no longer had style." This scene shows what a shallow and foolish fellow he is at first. By the end of the book, however, he has come to ignore his clothing. In fact, he discards it all (p. 100). This shows readers how Abel has transformed from a foppish dandy in the beginning of the book into a thoughtful and self-sufficient person by the end of the book.
- The watch represents civilization. Abel keeps it wound so he can track time, even though he has no need to do so on the island. Nonetheless, it is another element that helps keep him moored.
- Abel makes statues of the people he loves, beginning with Amanda. They represent art, and show how Abel has found his vocation in life.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

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