

# Fantastic Mr. Fox

by Roald Dahl

## Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Patricia Butler

A Perma-Bound Production

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### SYNOPSIS

**Chap. One:** Down in the valley there are three farms owned by three farmers—Farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce, and Farmer Bean—who are rich, mean, and stingy. Boggis, who is enormously fat, is a chicken farmer. His corpulence is attributed to his daily fare of chicken smothered with dumplings which he eats for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Bunce, who is described as a “pot-bellied dwarf,” is a duck and goose farmer whose “beastly” temper is caused by his doughnut and goose liver diet. And Bean, who is thin and clever, is a turkey and apple farmer. Bean never eats, but he ingests gallons of apple cider which he makes from the apples in his apple orchard. These three are known throughout the town, for the children sing a ditty about the farmers being crooks that are fat, short, lean, and mean.

**Chap. Two:** On a hill above the valley live Mr. Fox, his wife, and their four pups. Every evening, Mr. Fox asks his wife whether she would like a chicken from Boggis, a duck or goose from Bunce, or a turkey from Bean. And whatever she wants, Mr. Fox provides by stealing from one of the three farmers. This, of course, arouses their ire, and they set out to capture Mr. Fox by arming themselves and keeping watch over their own farms. But Mr. Fox is clever. When the wind blows towards him, he can distinguish between the three farmers because of each one's distinct smell. His keen sense of smell makes him unstoppable, so the farmers agree to work together to get rid of him. Since Bean knows where he lives, they decide to stake out his hole and kill him when he comes out.

**Chap. Three:** After Mrs. Fox chooses duck for dinner, she warns her husband to be careful. He shrugs off her warning, stating that he can smell “the goons a mile away.” Little does he know that the wind is blowing in the opposite direction, and he cannot “smell out” the three farmers who are outside his home, waiting for him to emerge. When Mr. Fox finally ventures out of his hole, his tail is shot off during a storm of bullets, but he still escapes. The farmers decide to use shovels to dig out Mr. Fox and his whole family.

**Chap. Four:** Mrs. Fox tends to the ailing Mr. Fox who now has a stump instead of a tail. There is no food, so the family dozes off. They are suddenly awakened by the sound of shovels which rip through the ceiling of their home. Thinking quickly, Mr. Fox instructs his wife and children to dig a tunnel deep into the ground. After about an hour of digging, they create enough distance between them and the farmers. They stop digging and rest. Mrs. Fox compliments her husband for saving their lives

and being such a “fantastic fox.” Her comment boosts Mr. Fox's ego and makes him love her more.

**Chap. Five:** Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are still digging as the sun comes up the next day. Though they have dug a hole big enough to contain a house, they are still unable to catch the foxes. Bean comes up with a plan to use “mechanical shovels” or tractors to dig the foxes out. While Bunce and Bean go to get the tractors, Boggis stays to watch over the fox hole. The two farmers return with monstrous machines that eat away the hillside and dig deep into the foxes' tunnel. When one of the Small Foxes sees daylight shining through the tunnel, Mr. Fox commands his crew to dig deeper.

**Chap. Six:** The machines and the foxes race to outdo each other. By five o'clock in the afternoon, Bunce and Bean, in a maniacal attempt to destroy Mr. Fox and his family, have totally turned the hill into a hole “like the crater of a volcano.” People come to see the crater, and they ask Boggis what is going on. He informs them that they are after a fox. The farmers are jeered and laughed at, but instead of feeling ashamed or embarrassed, they become more determined to catch the fox.

**Chap. Seven:** At six o'clock Bunce and Bean, tired and hungry, stop the machines. It has been an exhausting day, and the farmers are angry, but they are far from quitting. They make an oath not to return to their farms until the fox is caught. When Bunce asks about their next move, Bean threatens to throw him down the fox hole. Frightened, Bunce runs away. But Bean really has another idea. He hopes to starve the foxes out. The farmers set up camp to wait until the foxes come out.

**Chap. Eight:** That evening the farmers set their tents in the crater which surrounds Mr. Fox's hole. Trying to draw out the starving foxes, Boggis places steaming chicken at the entrance of the fox hole. The starving pups are tempted to come out, but Mrs. Fox restrains them.

Darkness falls and the farmers aim the headlights of the two tractors on the fox hole. Boggis wonders if Mr. Fox can dig a hole through the hill and escape to the other side. To prevent this from happening, the farmers send for their 108 farm hands, arm them, and station them on the other side of the hill while they wait at the fox hole. Since Mr. Fox can smell the farmers, especially Bean, he and his family stay in their hole.

**Chapter Nine:** The waiting game continues for three days and three nights. Meanwhile, Mr. Fox and his family are starving to death. One of the small pups begs for some relief, even suggesting that they leave their home, but Mrs. Fox would rather that they starve than be killed by the farmers. This gets Mr. Fox to thinking how he can save his family. At first he is delighted

with his plan, but then he thinks it through. It will take more digging and his wife and children are hungry and exhausted. Though he thinks his plan won't work, he is encouraged by his children to try it. Mrs. Fox, however, is too weak to help. She stays behind to regain her strength.

**Chap. Ten:** Mr. Fox's plan is to tunnel his way to Boggis's Chicken House Number One. The foxes begin digging and after a long while, they reach the area under the chicken house. Mr. Fox has hit his mark. He pushes up one of the floorboards and chickens are everywhere. The pups are wild with excitement, but Mr. Fox calms them down and tells them to get water from the drinking trough. Mr. Fox grabs three plump hens, kills them instantly with a flick of his jaws, and orders the pups back into the tunnel. He replaces the floorboards and then sends the oldest pup home with the three hens. Mr. Fox directs him to take the hens home to his mother so that she can prepare a feast.

**Chap. Eleven:** The oldest pup returns home and shows Mrs. Fox the three plump hens. At first, she thinks she is dreaming. But the pup convinces her that what she is seeing is real. He tells her that they have just left Boggis's and that Mr. Fox wants her to prepare the chickens for a feast. With renewed strength, Mrs. Fox begins her task. At the same time, Mr. Fox and the remaining pups are digging another tunnel.

**Chap. Twelve:** Under the direction of Mr. Fox, the three remaining pups continue to dig the tunnel. Hungry and tired, they are energized by the fact that a meal with Boggis's chickens is awaiting them. The digging continues until they run into Badger and his son who have been digging in circles for the past three days and nights. Badger informs Mr. Fox that the wood is deserted because men with guns are stationed all over the countryside and that the other animals, unable to get out and find food, are starving. Mr. Fox acknowledges that the situation they are in is all his fault, and he invites Badger and all the other animals to his house for a feast. Mr. Fox elicits Badger's help with the digging and send Badger's son to invite Mrs. Badger and the other animals to "a Fox's Feast."

**Chap. Thirteen:** Mr. Fox and Badger make a great team, and before long, they reach Bunce's Giant Storehouse, a warehouse of the finest ducks, geese, ham and, bacon. The pups and Badger are overwhelmed by the sight and begin to grab food, but they are stopped by Mr. Fox who tells them that they must not overdo it. They must choose wisely so that Bunce does not know that they have been there. So they steal four young ducks, a few geese, three hams, a side of bacon, and ten bunches of carrots. They borrow two of Bunce's push carts and load them with the food. Then Mr. Fox sends two of his three pups home with the food and a message for Mrs. Fox to prepare a feast for the Badgers, the Moles, the Rabbits, and the Weasels who he has invited for dinner. He also sends his love and word that he will be home after one more job.

**Chap. Fourteen:** Mr. Fox announces "one more visit," and his son guesses Bean's place. Badger is uncomfortable about stealing, but Mr. Fox convinces him that anyone would steal food to save his children from starving. He further states that stealing is better than killing and that at least they are not stooping to the farmers' level. Mr. Fox wins him over, and they continue to dig until they reach the wall of an underground room.

**Chap. Fifteen:** As Mr. Fox examines the wall of Bean's Secret Cider Cellar, he encounters Rat who claims the cellar as his home and demands that they leave the premises. Mr. Fox has

to threaten to eat Rat before he is allowed entrance to the cellar. Once inside, Mr. Fox, Badger, and the last fox pup notice hundreds of jars of cider. The pup and Badger taste the cider and declare it the best. Rat reappears, again demanding that they leave before all of them are caught. Suddenly, they hear a voice and the sound of someone coming down the cellar steps.

**Chap. Sixteen:** Mrs. Bean sends Mabel, who works for her, to the cellar to get Bean more cider. Before Mabel reaches the cellar, Mr. Fox, Badger, and the pup hide behind a row of cider jars. They are almost discovered by Mabel when she takes a jar close to where they are hiding. They overhear Mrs. Bean and Mabel discussing Mr. Fox. Bean has promised to give Mabel Mr. Fox's tail, but Mabel learns that the tail of "the rotten brute" has been "shot to pieces." Instead, Mrs. Bean promises to give Mabel Mr. Fox's head. Gripping the jars of cider in each hand and looking for the rats she says she smells in the cellar, Mabel climbs slowly up the steps. Once the door slams, Mr. Fox, Badger, and the pup grab a jar of cider each and head back down the hole as Rat hurls insults after them.

**Chap. Seventeen:** After Mr. Fox bricks up the hole in the wall, he, Badger, and the pup hurry towards Mr. Fox's home. Singing on the way, Mr. Fox and Badger anticipate seeing their wives. When they reach their destination, they find twenty-nine animals seated at a large earthen table and waiting to begin the feast. After the animals exchange greetings, they prepare to eat. Badger and Mrs. Fox toast Mr. Fox for his heroism. Then Mr. Fox toasts the three farmers for the food that they have supplied unawares. Finally, Mr. Fox proposes to build an underground village, using Boggis, Bunce, and Bean as their suppliers. Everyone agrees.

**Chap. Eighteen:** Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are still armed and waiting for Mr. Fox to come out of his hole.

#### TIME LINE OF THE ACTION

##### Day One

Mrs. Fox requests two ducks for dinner.  
Mr. Fox goes out of his hole and his tail is shot off.  
Farmers decide to get shovels to dig out foxes.  
Mrs. Fox tends to her husband's bleeding tail.  
Farmers attempt to dig out the foxes.  
Mr. Fox and his family dig a tunnel to save their lives.

##### Next Morning

Boggis, Bunce, and Bean continue to dig with shovels.  
Farmers give up on shovels and use tractors.  
Farmers dig and try to outdo the foxes.

##### Five P.M.

Farmers turn hill into crater.  
Villagers come to see crater; they jeer and laugh at farmers.

##### Six P.M.

Farmers stop digging with tractor and decide to starve the foxes out.

##### That Evening

Tents are set up for Boggis, Bunce, and Bean near Mr. Fox's hole.  
Farmers order their farm workers to arm themselves and surround the hill so that no animals can escape.

##### Next Day

The farmers sit and wait for Mr. Fox to come out.  
Mr. Fox can smell the farmers, so the foxes stay underground.

### 3 Days Later

Mr. Fox and his family are starving. Mr. Fox has a plan. He and pups dig to Boggis's Chicken House Number One. Fox sends oldest pup home with three hens so that Mrs. Fox can cook them for a feast. Continuing to dig, Mr. Fox and the three remaining pups run into Badger and his son. Badger gives Mr. Fox an update on what has been happening on the outside. Mr. Fox invites Badger and the other animals to a feast at his place. Badger's son is sent home with an invitation to "Fox's feast." Mr. Fox and Badger team up to dig to Bunce's Giant Storehouse. Animals load push carts with food and return to hole. Mr. Fox sends two of his sons home with loot. Badger feels guilty about stealing. Mr. Fox convinces Badger that they are doing what is right—stealing is not worse than killing. Mr. Fox, Badger, and pup dig to Bean's Secret Cider Cellar. Rat confronts them. Badger and pup enjoy a sip of Bean's cider. Mabel interrupts argument between Mr. Fox and Rat. Mabel comes close to finding Mr. Fox, Badger, and pup. Mrs. Bean promises Mabel Mr. Fox's head. Mr. Fox, Badger, and pup hurry to Mr. Fox's home with one jar of cider each. The three arrive before the feast begins. Badger and Mrs. Fox toast Mr. Fox. Mr. Fox toasts Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. Mr. Fox proposes underground village.

### Meanwhile

The farmers are still waiting for Mr. Fox to come out of his hole.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Although Roald Dahl was born in Wales on September 13, 1916, his parents were from Norway. His father, Harald Dahl, ran a successful shipbrokering firm in Cardiff, a county borough in Wales. When Dahl was about four years old, his father died and left a sizable estate to his wife with instructions on how he wanted his children to be educated. Harald Dahl was impressed with the English educational system and wanted his children to be educated in England. Dahl's mother, on the other hand, wanted nothing to do with England, but she carried out her husband's wishes.

Dahl's experiences in English schools were devastating. The regimentation, humiliation, and corporal punishment were foreign to him and contradicted the way in which he was raised by his mother. Dahl thought of himself as an outsider, partly because his mother had insulated him from English society. She spoke mostly Norwegian, taught her children to speak the language, and introduced them to Norse myths and legends. When Dahl went to school, he left his close-knit family and entered a world that he considered cruel and alien.

After graduating from Repton Public School in 1934, Dahl decided to end his formal education, even though his mother had offered to send him to Oxford or Cambridge. Instead, he accepted a position with Shell Oil Company's branch office in East Africa.

When England declared war on Germany in 1939, Dahl enlisted in the Royal Air Force, where he learned to fly fighter planes in Nairobi, Kenya. One year later, Dahl suffered head injuries as a result of a plane crash in Libya. He spent several months in a military hospital in Alexandria, Egypt, before rejoining his squadron which was stationed in Greece.

Dahl's military career ended when he began suffering crippling headaches during dogfights. Worried that he would lose consciousness while in the air, the squadron doctor refused to allow him to fly. Dahl was sent back to England on leave as an invalid. When his leave was over, Dahl reported back to duty. But his medical problems were so pronounced that he was sent to Washington as an assistant air attaché.

While at the British Embassy in Washington, D. C., Dahl began his writing career. His first published work, "Shot Down over Libya," appeared in *Saturday Evening Post*. The article, a retelling of his crash in Libya, was well received, and Dahl was encouraged to continue to write about his other experiences as a fighter pilot. His articles appeared in prominent American magazines, including the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Collier's*.

Dahl was so successful in getting all of his articles published that he tried his hand at writing a children's fantasy about tiny creatures who sabotage RAF fighter planes. The story called *The Gremlins* was published in 1943 and began Dahl's prolific career as a writer for children and adults.

Dahl experimented with different writing forms, including nonfiction, short stories, screenplays, novels, and poetry. Though he died in 1990, he is known as the best-selling author of children's fiction in Great Britain today and one of the most widely read in the western world.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Dahl established himself as a leading short-story writer. Every year he produced two or three short stories which appeared in the *New Yorker*. His stories were praised for their vivid details, carefully constructed plots, and surprise endings. Over the years, Dahl published seven stories for younger children: *The Magic Finger*, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *The Enormous Crocodile*, *The Twits*, *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me*, *Esio Trot*, and *The Minpins*. Except for *Esio Trot*, these are fantasy stories.

When Dahl set out to write *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, he wanted to create a fast-moving and entertaining novel. A few reviewers mentioned the book's "unconventional morality." Margery Fisher, for example, called it a "robust tale" and described Mr. Fox as a "worthy descendant of the medieval Renard." She concludes her review by calling the tale a "cheerfully amoral satire." Many reviewers, including Ingeborg Boudreau of the *New York Times Book Review*, praised the novel's fast-paced plot. Boudreau wrote, "It's an edge-of-your-seat kind of story with a makes-you-feel-good-all-over ending."

In reference to Dahl's characters, Amy Kellman in *Grade Teacher* notes that "Boggis, Bunce and Bean must be three of the nastiest farmers ever to appear in a children's book. Their villainy reaches new heights as they fanatically try to kill our hero, the fantastic Mr. Fox." She concludes with "the author uses language with verve, embroidering his descriptions of the farmers so that they become nastier in every chapter."

Dahl's fiction is a reflection of his values and beliefs, but he rarely discussed this aspect of his writing. When approached

about the meaning of his works, he was evasive. If pressed, he responded by stating that it was the critics' job to analyze his works. He simply wanted to entertain his readers and to teach children "the use of words, the joy of playing with language."

In 1954 Dahl received the Edgar Allan Poe Award from the Mystery Writers of America for *Someone Like You*. In 1983 he received the Whitbread Award for *The Witches*.

#### OTHER WORKS BY ROALD DAHL

*Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life* (1988)  
*The Best of Roald Dahl* (1978)  
*The BFG* (1982)  
*Boy - Tales of Childhood* (1984)  
*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964)  
*Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* (1972)  
*Completely Unexpected Tales* (1986)  
*Danny the Champion of the World* (1975)  
*Dirty Beasts* (1983)  
*The Enormous Crocodile* (1978)  
*Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970)  
*Further Tales of the Unexpected* (1981)  
*George's Marvelous Medicine* (1981)  
*The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me* (1985)  
*Going Solo* (1986)  
*The Gremlins* (1943)  
*James and the Giant Peach* (1962)  
*Kiss Kiss* (1959)  
*The Magic Finger* (1966)  
*Matilda* (1988)  
*More Tales of the Unexpected* (1980)  
*My Uncle Oswald* (1979)  
*Over to You* (1946)  
*Revolting Rhymes* (1982)  
*Rhyme Stew* (1989)  
*Roald Dahl's Book of Ghost Stories* (1983)  
*The Roald Dahl Omnibus* (1986)  
*A Roald Dahl Selection: Nine Short Stories* (1980)  
*Selected Stories of Roald Dahl* (1968)  
*Some Time Never: A Fable for Supermen* (1948)  
*Someone Like You* (1953)  
*Switch B\*\*\*h* (1974)  
*Tales of the Unexpected* (1979)  
*Taste and Other Tales* (1979)  
*Twenty Nine Kisses from Roald Dahl* (1969)  
*The Twits* (1980)  
*Two Fables* (1986)  
*The Witches* (1983)  
*The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More* (1977)  
**Books published posthumously:**  
*The Collected Short Stories of Roald Dahl* (1991)  
*Esio Trot* (1990)  
*Memories with Food at Gypsy House* (1991)  
*The Minpins* (1991)  
*My Year* (1993)  
*Roald Dahl's Guide to Railway Safety* (1991)  
*Roald Dahl's Revolting Recipes* (1994)  
*The Umbrella Man and Other Stories* (1998)  
*The Vicar of Nibbleswicke* (1991)

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 "Roald Dahl," <[www.nd.edu/~khoward1/Roald.html](http://www.nd.edu/~khoward1/Roald.html)>.  
 "Roald Dahl," <[www.puffin.co.uk/living/aut\\_59.html](http://www.puffin.co.uk/living/aut_59.html)>.  
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#### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the characteristics of a hero
2. To discuss the qualities of a good leader
3. To appreciate wildlife and explore ways to preserve it
4. To consider the challenges that farmers face when dealing with the fox and other predatory animals
5. To explore the world of the fox and other burrowing animals
6. To identify ways to conserve the environment
7. To discuss the theme of survival
8. To identify and use selected literary terms
9. To examine ways that people depend on each other in their families, neighborhoods, and communities
10. To analyze the ways in which humans and animals are portrayed in literature

#### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss how Mr. Fox outwits the farmers
2. To explain whether it is ever right to steal
3. To examine how the characters in the story work as a team
4. To define simile and onomatopoeia
5. To characterize Boggis, Bunce, and Bean
6. To analyze the ways in which Mr. Fox is a good father and leader
7. To identify the ways in which the animals fight to survive
8. To compose a report on a burrowing animal
9. To discuss how each person is a part of a community
10. To research the hunting laws of your state
11. To contrast the portrayal of the farmers and Mr. Fox
12. To debate whether the farmers' actions are justified

#### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

To enhance students' appreciation and understanding of the novel, present them with the following terms:

**conflict:** a problem that confronts the character in a piece of literature. The basic conflict is Mr. Fox against the three farmers, Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. Because Mr. Fox steals from the farmers, he is targeted by them, and the whole novel centers around their plot to kill him and his family, even if it means destroying the land and the other animals that live in the valley.

**hero/heroine:** the main character in a work of literature. In heroic literature, the hero or heroine is clever and brave and accomplishes the extraordinary. Mr. Fox exemplifies a hero because he uses wit and courage to save his family and the other animals from starvation. He is called "fantastic fox" by his wife and hailed by the other animals as a hero.

**onomatopoeia:** using words that imitate the sounds they describe. Dahl uses onomatopoeia throughout the novel. For example, the guns "bang-bang" when the farmers shoot at Mr. Fox. The shovels "scrunch, scrunch" as the farmers dig through the ceiling of Mr. Fox's home. And the mechanical shovels "clank" as Bunce and Bean drive them into the wood.

**simile:** figurative language that compares two unlike things, introduced by the words "like" and "as." Bean is described as "thin as a pencil" and the fumes of apple cider hang around him "like poisonous gases."

**theme:** main idea or underlying subject of a work of literature. One of the themes in the novel is leadership and what makes a leader. Mr. Fox, as the head of his household, assumes the responsibility for taking care of his wife and children. He never wavers when it comes to putting his family first. In fact, he thinks through each problem he faces and devises and executes a workable plan. Though being a thief is not an admirable trait, Mr. Fox feels he has no other recourse since his children are starving. He says to Badger, ". . . do you know anyone in the whole world who wouldn't swipe a few chickens if his children were starving to death?"(58).

### SETTING

Although no particular city, state, or country is indicated in the novel, the two basic settings are outside Mr. Fox's hole and underground. Outside, of course, is where the farmers live and where Mr. Fox goes in order to get food for his family. When Mr. Fox ventures outside, his tail is shot to pieces by the farmers. It is also outside where the farmers attempt to dig the foxes out of their hole and where they completely destroy the hillside with their mechanical shovels. For Mr. Fox, his family, and the other animals, the outside is a hostile environment where three manic farmers are out to kill them.

On the other hand, the underground represents home and safety. It is where Mr. Fox and the other animals reside. It is also where Mr. Fox returns and is tended to by Mrs. Fox when he is shot by the farmers. Underground is a place where the animal families take care of each other. Finally, when the farmers attempt to starve the foxes out, Mr. Fox initiates the digging of an underground tunnel to each farm and steals the food he needs to feed his family and the other animals. Whether on the outside or underground, the game is survival, and the animals learn to play the game well.

### RELATED READING

#### CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

##### Fiction

Adams, Richard. *The Plague Dogs* and *Watership Down*

Byers, Betsy. *The Midnight Fox*

Cawley, John. *Reynard the Fox* and "*The Werefox*"

Colson, Thora. *Rinkin of Dragon's Wood*

Daniels, Lucy. *Cub in the Cupboard*

Dann, Colin. *The Animals of Farthing Wood*

Dudley, Ernest. *Rufus*

Fjell, Ingemar. *Jack Fox, Licensed Detective*

Fox, Dr. Michael. *Vixie, The Story of a Little Fox*

George, Jean Craighead. *Vulpes the Red Fox*

Graham, Keith. *Foxes*

Henry, J. David. *How to Spot a Fox*

Henry, Marguerite. *Cinnabar, The One O'Clock Fox*

Horwood, Harold. *The Foxes of Beachy Cove*

Jayne, Mitchell. *The Forest in the Wind*

Jenks, Almet. *The Huntsman at the Gate*

Kilworth, Garry. *Hunter's Moon*

King-Smith, Dick. *The Fox Busters*

MacCaskill, Bridget. *The Blood is Wild*

Redvane. "*The Beast Without, The Beast Within*"

Roberts, Sir Charles G. D. *Red Fox*

Ross, David. *Letters from Foxy*

Rudnick, Bret Ryan. "*Foxfire*"

Smith, Eunice Young. *The Knowing One*

Stranger, Joyce. *The Running Foxes*

Tesnohldek, Rudolf. *The Cunning Little Vixen*

Thomas, Jane Resh. *Fox in a Trap*

Travers, P. L. *The Fox at the Manger*

Wharton, William. *Franky Furbo*

##### Nonfiction

Grambo, Rebecca L. *The World of the Fox*

Hadidan, J., et al., eds. *Wild Neighbors—the humane approach to living with wildlife*

Hodge, G. ed. *Pocket Guide to the Humane Control of Wildlife in Cities and Towns*

Mason, Cherie. *Wild Fox: A True Story*

Seton, Ernest Thompson. *Biography of a Silver Fox*

##### Internet

"Adam's Fox Box," <[www.foxbox.org/](http://www.foxbox.org/)>

"Fox Forest," <[www.foxforest.com/](http://www.foxforest.com/)>

"National Fox Welfare Society,"  
<[www.nfws.org.uk/index.html](http://www.nfws.org.uk/index.html)>

"Vulpes" <[www.vulpes.org/](http://www.vulpes.org/)>

"Vulpine Dreams," <[www.vulpine.pp.se/](http://www.vulpine.pp.se/)>

### THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Roald Dahl's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* should include these aspects.

#### Themes

- family values
- survival
- sharing
- starvation
- community
- stealing
- leadership
- courage
- fear
- instinct

#### Motifs

- being a responsible leader
- making wise choices
- developing a plan

- putting others first
- working as a team
- protecting one's property
- avoiding excess
- destroying the environment
- overcoming conflicts

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, and sentences that have a particular meaning in this novel. Explain the meaning of each as it relates to the book. Use the chapter and page numbers given in parentheses to reread the term in context.

1. In the hole lived Mr. Fox and Mrs. Fox and their four Small Foxes. (Chap. 2, p. 7)  
*(After mating, foxes begin to explore den sites. These dens can be found in fields at the edge of forests and near fallen timber, where good drainage can be found. Dens are mainly used to raise pups.)*
2. Every evening as soon as it got dark, Mr. Fox would say to Mrs. Fox, "Well, my darling, what shall it be this time? A plump chicken from Boggis? A duck or a goose from Bunce? Or a nice turkey from Bean?" And when Mrs. Fox had told him what she wanted, Mr. Fox would creep down into the valley in the darkness of the night and help himself. (Chap. 2, p. 7)  
*(The male fox, also called a dog fox, brings food to the young after they are born. Foxes come out at dusk.)*
3. "I can smell those goons a mile away." (Chap. 3, p. 10)  
Just then, his sharp night-eyes caught a glint of something bright behind a tree not far away. (Chap. 3, p. 12)  
*(The text notes that each of the farmers has a distinctive smell—Boggis smells like chicken skin, Bunce like goose liver, and Bean like apple cider. In reality the fox is an efficient predator with a keen sense of hearing, sight, and smell.)*
4. "We'll have him out in five minutes with mechanical shovels. (Chap. 5, p. 21)  
*(Bean is referring to an earth-moving machine called a heavy-duty tractor. These machines can be fitted with endless tracks to grip the ground and with a large, movable blade attached in front called a bulldozer. Bulldozers are used to clear debris, remove boulders, and level ground.)*
5. The hole the machines had dug was like the crater of a volcano. (Chap. 6, p. 28)  
*(A crater is a bowl-shaped pit or depression on the surface of a planet or moon. Craters are formed by volcanic activity or meteorite impact.)*
6. Boggis picked up a steaming chicken and held it close to the fox's hole. (Chap. 8, p. 31)  
*(Foxes are omnivores and will eat whatever is available. The fox's diet consists mostly of small mammals such as mice and voles, small birds, insects, fruit, and the larger prey of other predators. The false common belief is that foxes immediately go after chickens.)*
7. Badger made the hole in the ceiling bigger and dropped down beside the foxes. (Chap. 11, p. 46)  
*(Badgers are medium-sized omnivorous burrowing mammals of the weasel family. They are heavily furred, distinctly marked, and very strong. They live in dens, feed on gophers and other pests, and are nocturnal.)*

8. "We mustn't overdo it," he said. "Mustn't give the game away. Mustn't let them know what we've been up to." (Chap. 13, p. 55)  
*(When Mr. Fox, Badger and their children reach Bunce's Mighty Storehouse, everyone is randomly grabbing food to take with them. Mr. Fox advises them not to overdo it. He knows that they must be careful to leave things in order so that the missing items will not be detected. Fox wants to be able to return for more food.)*
9. Mr. Fox gave a brilliant smile, flashing his white teeth.  
"My dear Rat," he said softly, "I am a hungry fellow and if you don't hop it quickly I shall eat-you-up-in-one-gulp!" (Chap. 15, p. 62)  
*(Farmland with woodlots and open fields provide the fox with good cover and abundant rodents, especially field mice. When red foxes have been eradicated from an area, the rodent population increases.)*
10. "My dear old furry frump," he said, "do you know anyone in the whole world who wouldn't swipe a few chickens if his children were starving to death?" (Chap. 14, pp. 58-59)  
*(Badger has second thoughts about stealing from Bunce. Mr. Fox reminds him they are stealing in order to feed his children.)*

### 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 novel.

#### Literal Level

1. Who are the three farmers?  
*(The three farmers are Farmer Boggis, Farmer Bunce, and Farmer Bean.)*
2. What is each farmer's specialty?  
*(Boggis is a chicken farmer, Bunce is a duck-and-geese farmer, and Bean is a turkey-and-apple farmer. Bean also makes apple cider and stores it in his cellar.)*
3. How are the farmers alike?  
*(The farmers are rich men who live in the valley. They are mean, nasty, and stingy.)*
4. Which farmer is considered the "cleverest"? Do you agree?  
*(Bean is considered the "cleverest." He is the one who devises the plan to catch Mr. Fox. Bean is also referred to as "crafty." He knows where Mr. Fox lives, and he suggests the use of shovels to dig him out. It is also his idea to camp near the fox hole and to send armed farm workers to surround the hill so that Mr. Fox cannot escape.)*
5. How do the people in the community view the farmers?  
*(The children of the town sing a song about them. The farmers are called "crooks" and "equally mean." The three destroy the hillside by leaving a hole "like the crater of a volcano," and the people call Boggis "mad" when he tells them that they have done this in order to catch a fox.)*
6. Where do Mr. Fox and his family live?  
*(The Fox family lives on a hill above the valley in a hole under a large tree.)*
7. Why are Boggis, Bunce, and Bean determined to catch Mr. Fox?  
*(Mr. Fox has been stealing each farmer's livestock.)*
8. How do they set out to catch Mr. Fox?

*(First, they stake out his hole, planning to shoot him on sight. However, they only get his tail. Next, they attempt to dig him out by using hand shovels. When that doesn't work, they use mechanical shovels. They don't catch Mr. Fox, but they literally destroy the hillside. Finally, they decide to starve him out.)*

9. How does Mr. Fox outwit the farmers?

*(When the farmers attempt to dig the foxes out, Mr. Fox and his family dig a deep tunnel. Then when Mr. Fox realizes that the farmers are waiting for him outside his hole, he devises a plan to tunnel his way to each farm and steals food in order to feed not only his family but the other animals that are unable to hunt for food.)*

10. Describe the hillside after the farmers use the mechanical shovels.

*(The hillside is destroyed. It looks like the crater of a volcano.)*

#### Interpretive Level

11. The Fox family is portrayed in a much better light than the humans. Explain.

*(The human representatives are Boggis, Bunce, and Bean. They come across as mean, greedy, and nasty. The reader's sympathy is with Mr. Fox and his family since the animals are stealing in order to survive. On the other hand, the Fox family is a family. The reader sees them loving, caring, and supporting each other. And the fact that they share with the other animals makes them seem more humane than their human counterparts.)*

12. Discuss the conflict in the novel.

*(The conflict is man against nature. Usually in fiction the reader sympathizes with man when he is in conflict with nature. This novel, however, presents the problem mainly from the animal's perspective.)*

13. The farmers are determined to get Mr. Fox no matter what. Explain this statement.

*(No matter the cost, the farmers are determined to catch Mr. Fox. The destruction of the hillside, the hunting of other animals, and even the disruption of the lives of the farm hands show their "no matter what" attitude.)*

#### Critical Level

14. Discuss the elements in the novel that are realistic.

15. Debate whether or not the farmers are justified in hunting Mr. Fox and his family.

#### Creative Level

16. Pretend that you are one of the farmers. Devise your own plan to catch Mr. Fox.

17. Compose an invitation to Mr. Fox's feast.

18. Draw a map of the underground village with tunnels leading to the three farms.

### ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

#### Art and Music

1. Create a collage of burrowing animals.
2. Draw the three farmers as described in the novel.
3. Draw Mr. Fox's family portrait.
4. Design a book jacket for the novel. Include a summary of the novel on the leaf of the jacket.
5. Compose a song that tells the story of Mr. Fox, using the

tune of a popular song.

6. Listen to and sing songs about foxes.

7. Build a model farm.

#### History and Social Studies

1. Write a report on one of the following types of farming:

- a. poultry farming
- b. dairy farming
- c. fish farming
- d. organic farming
- e. truck farming
- f. forestry

2. Write a report on the game laws of your state.

3. Define community. Discuss how each person is part of a community and how each person can help to make the community better.

4. Organize a recycling hunt on the school grounds or in your neighborhood.

#### Geography

1. On a map of the United States, shade in the areas which indicate where foxes, badgers, moles, weasels, and rabbits live. Share your findings with the class.

2. Create a map of the valley. Include the three farms and the tunnels which lead to each farm. Label each item.

#### Science and Health

1. Write a report on a burrowing animal. Include information about its physical characteristics, geographic range, habitat, food habits, behavior, reproduction, and conservation.

2. Create a diet chart for a wild animal of your choice.

3. Prepare a pamphlet that shows ways to help an injured animal.

4. Explore the medicinal uses of apple cider.

5. Pretend that you are an animal zoo keeper and have been sent to Africa to observe your animal in its natural environment. Make diary entries for a week about your animal.

6. Make a nest box for a wild animal.

7. Investigate how human behavior affects the environment—littering, oil spills, fishing, etc.

8. Visit a petting farm. Write a paragraph about your visit—what did you see, touch, and hear?

#### Math

1. Visit a grocery store and make a list of the different kinds of apples and their prices per pound. Are the prices the same or different for each variety of apple? Why?

2. Pretend that the animals have to pay for their meal at Fox's feast. Prepare a menu with prices. Then using a local grocery store ad, check the prices of each item served at the feast. Calculate each family's meal.

3. Make a list of all the seasonal fruits that you would like to include in a family fruit salad. Ask permission to purchase the fruit and keep a record of how much each item costs. Add up the numbers for a total cost of the fruit purchased.

#### Language Arts

1. Prepare an illustrated glossary of difficult words from the novel.

2. Make a list of twenty sentences which contain prepositional phrases from the novel. Underline each phrase and circle each object of the preposition.

3. Write a "thank you" letter to Mr. Fox from one of the ani-

## TEACHER'S NOTES

mals who attends the feast.

4. Find examples of similes in the novel. Then write a description of one of the characters using three of your own similes.
5. Survey ten people to determine what qualities they feel are important in a leader. Summarize your findings in a paragraph.
6. Pretend that Mr. Fox is running for mayor of the underground village. In a paragraph explain why Mr. Fox is an example of good leadership.

### ***Drama***

Work in groups to write a short skit based on a scene from the novel. Present the scene to the class.

### **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

1. Design an animal postage stamp which encourages the preservation of wildlife.
2. Discover how apple cider is made. Serve cider to classmates.
3. Brainstorm ways to protect the environment. Then create posters which encourage students to get involved in recycling, keeping the air clean, or saving endangered animals.
4. Read a nonfiction selection about foxes. How is Dahl's portrayal of the fox different from or similar to the nonfiction account?
5. Read aloud an interesting excerpt from the novel.
6. Brainstorm ways in which farmers can protect their livestock from wild animals without harming the animals.
7. Visit an apple orchard. Determine how long it takes before a tree bears fruit, how much fruit one tree produces, and ways in which the fruit is used.
8. Illustrate and label a chart showing the different varieties of apples and their uses.

### **ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT**

1. Write a news story using one of the following headlines:
  - a. Fox Flees Farms with Food
  - b. Farmers Fight Back
  - c. Farmland Destroyed
  - d. Farmers Huddle Outside Fox's Hole
  - e. Animals Escape
  - f. Fox's Feast is Fabulous
  - g. Plan for Underground Village is a Success
  - h. Fox Outsmarts Farmers
  - i. Farmers Still Waiting to Nab Fox
2. Working in groups, write and present a short skit based on a scene from the novel.
3. Using the first person, retell the story from one of the farmers' point of view.
4. Write a descriptive rhyme, characterizing the three farmers.



## VOCABULARY TEST

Match each boldfaced word with its meaning listed below. Write the letter of the meaning in the space next to the sentence number.

- |               |             |           |                  |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|------------------|
| a. eager      | f. peeping  | k. fat    | p. not deep      |
| b. stealing   | g. keepsake | l. mocked | q. moody         |
| c. roaming    | h. moist    | m. hungry | r. little pieces |
| d. mouth open | i. disorder | n. juicy  | s. caught        |
| e. frantic    | j. rigid    | o. hole   | t. bright red    |

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. He was so short his chin would have been under water in the **shallow** end of any swimming-pool in the world.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The wood was **murky** and very still.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. He looked very **glum**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Now there began a **desperate** race, the machines against the foxes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The farmers didn't stop for lunch; they were too **keen** to finish the job.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. "You'll never come **prowling** around my farm again!"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The people **jeered** and laughed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. They stood at the edge of the **crater** and stared down at Boggis, Bunce, and Bean.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. When he smiled, you saw his **scarlet** gums.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The Small Fox ran back along the tunnel as fast as he could, carrying the three **plump** hens.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. "It's **chaos**!"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. They stood and **gaped**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. "We must be neat and tidy and take just a few of the choicest **morsels**."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. "You're **poaching**!" shrieked Rat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. They stayed absolutely still, their ears pricked, their bodies **tense**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. **Peering** around the jars, they saw a huge woman coming down into the cellar.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. "And by the way, Mrs. Bean, your husband promised I could have the tail as a **souvenir**."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. "What did I tell you! You nearly got **nabbed**, didn't you?"
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. You must remember no one had eaten a thing for several days. They were **ravenous**.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. There was only the sound of crunching and chewing as the animals attacked the **succulent** food.

## COMPREHENSION TEST A

### Part I: True/False (30 points)

In the space provided write **T** if the statement is completely true or **F** if any part of the statement is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are wealthy farmers who live in a valley.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Boggis and Bunce are chicken farmers and Bean is a turkey-apple farmer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Mr. Fox lives with Mrs. Fox and their three children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Every afternoon, Mr. Fox leaves his home to steal food from one of the three farmers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Boggis, Bunce, and Bean try to catch Mr. Fox, but he sees them hiding in the dark.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Mr. Fox loses his tail when it gets caught in a trap.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The farmers use shovels to try to dig Mr. Fox out.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. When the farmers dig, Mr. Fox and his family run to the hills.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Mr. Fox and his children dig a tunnel to Boggis's Chicken House Number One.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The foxes raid the chicken house and steal a dozen chickens.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Mr. Fox and Badger dig a tunnel to Bunce's Giant Storehouse.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Once inside the storehouse, Mr. Fox insists that Badger take all of the food that he can carry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Badger feels guilty about stealing food from the farmers.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Mr. Fox meets Rat in Bean's Cider Cellar.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. When Mr. Fox reaches his home, he finds that all of the food he has sent home is gone.

### Part II: Cause and Effect (20 points)

Finish each of these sentences.

1. Boggis, Bunce, and Bean want to catch Mr. Fox because

---

2. The people of the town jeer and laugh at the farmers because

---

3. Boggis, Bunce, and Bean instruct their farm hands to surround the hillside because

---

4. Mrs. Fox is unable to continue digging because

---

5. The animals will never need to go outside for food because

---

**Part III: Matching (20 points)**

Match each description with the name of the correct character. You may use some answers more than once.

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| _____ 1. is considered the "cleverest" farmer.                      | a. Farmer Boggis |
| _____ 2. is afraid that her children will be killed.                | b. Farmer Bunce  |
| _____ 3. is described as a "pot-bellied dwarf."                     | c. Farmer Bean   |
| _____ 4. returns with Bean, driving one of the "terrible tractors." | d. Mr. Fox       |
| _____ 5. owns Chicken House Number One.                             | e. Mrs. Fox      |
| _____ 6. refers to Mr. Fox as a "fantastic fox."                    | f. Mrs. Bean     |
| _____ 7. wants Mr. Fox's tail as a souvenir.                        | g. Rat           |
| _____ 8. helps Mr. Fox raid Bunce's farmhouse.                      | h. Badger        |
| _____ 9. tells Mr. Fox to get out so that he can sip his cider.     | i. Mabel         |
| _____ 10. is the official hunter for the community of animals.      |                  |

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

Choose any two to answer. Write a paragraph for each. Write in complete sentences.

1. How do the farmers try to catch Mr. Fox?
2. How does Mr. Fox outwit the farmers?
3. Why is Mr. Fox considered a good leader?

## COMPREHENSION TEST B

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Read each character description. In the list below, find the character who matches the description. Write the letter of the character in the space next to the description number.

- |       |   |                  |
|-------|---|------------------|
| _____ | 1. She wants Mr. Fox's tail as a souvenir.                                  | a. Mr. Fox       |
| _____ | 2. He blames Mr. Fox for the problems the animals are facing.               | b. Farmer Bean   |
| _____ | 3. He is a fat chicken farmer.  | c. Farmer Bunce  |
| _____ | 4. He is as thin as a pencil and the "cleverest" of them all.               | d. Farmer Boggis |
| _____ | 5. She is so exhausted because of a lack of food that she takes to her bed. | e. Rat           |
| _____ | 6. He is a duck-and-goose farmer with a pot belly.                          | f. Badger        |
| _____ | 7. The cider cellar is his home.  | g. Mrs. Fox      |
| _____ | 8. He toasts Boggis, Bunce, and Bean for a delicious meal.                  | h. Mabel         |
| _____ | 9. He and Bean use mechanical shovels to try to dig out Mr. Fox.            |                  |
| _____ | 10. He feels guilty about stealing from the farmers.                        |                  |

### Part II: Identification (30 points)

Explain how each of the following is important to the novel.

1. crater

2. tents

3. dwarf

4. shovels

5. tail

**Part III: Fill in the Blank (20 points)**

Complete the following sentences by filling each blank with a word or phrase.

1. Bean keeps an orchard full of \_\_\_\_\_ trees.
2. Mr. Fox lives with his wife and \_\_\_\_\_ children.
3. Bean predicts that it will take \_\_\_\_\_ days before Mr. Fox comes out of his hole.
4. When the Small Fox returns with three hens, \_\_\_\_\_ thinks that she is dreaming.
5. Badger tells Mr. Fox that men with \_\_\_\_\_ are preventing the animals from getting food.
6. Mr. Fox invites all of the animals to a \_\_\_\_\_ at his house.
7. Using mechanical shovels, the farmers dig a hole in the hillside that resembles the \_\_\_\_\_ of a volcano.
8. Mr. Fox steals \_\_\_\_\_ from Boggis's farm.
9. Mr. Fox and Badger are almost caught by \_\_\_\_\_ when they try to steal cider.
10. Mrs. Fox calls her husband a \_\_\_\_\_ fox.

**Part IV: Essay (30 points)**

1. Discuss how one of the following themes is expressed in the novel.
  - What Makes a Leader
  - Sharing with Others
  - Teamwork Gets the Job Done
  - Planning is Important
  - Hero Needs To Be \_\_\_\_\_
2. Boggis, Bunce, and Bean are characterized as mean, stingy, and greedy. How do they compare to the animals in the story? Cite specific examples.

## ANSWER KEY

### VOCABULARY TEST

- |       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 1. p  | 11. i |
| 2. h  | 12. d |
| 3. q  | 13. r |
| 4. e  | 14. b |
| 5. a  | 15. j |
| 6. c  | 16. f |
| 7. l  | 17. g |
| 8. o  | 18. s |
| 9. t  | 19. m |
| 10. k | 20. n |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: True/False (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F  | 11. T |
| 2. F | 7. T  | 12. F |
| 3. F | 8. F  | 13. T |
| 4. F | 9. T  | 14. T |
| 5. F | 10. F | 15. F |

#### Part II: Cause and Effect (20 points)

1. Mr. Fox has been stealing from them.
2. they are destroying the hillside in order to catch a fox.
3. they do not want Mr. Fox to escape
4. she is hungry and exhausted
5. they have dug tunnels to the three farms.

#### Part III: Matching ( 20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. e  |
| 2. e | 7. i  |
| 3. b | 8. h  |
| 4. b | 9. g  |
| 5. a | 10. d |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. h | 6. c  |
| 2. f | 7. e  |
| 3. d | 8. a  |
| 4. b | 9. c  |
| 5. g | 10. f |

#### Part II: Identification (30 points)

Answers will vary.

#### Part III: Fill in the Blank (20 points)

- |             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. apple    | 6. feast      |
| 2. four     | 7. crater     |
| 3. three    | 8. chicken    |
| 4. Mrs. Fox | 9. Mabel      |
| 5. guns     | 10. fantastic |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

**TEACHER'S NOTES**



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