

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Bunnicula Strikes Again!

by  
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## Book Information

James Howe, Bunnicula Strikes Again!

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Interest Level: MG

When Bunnicula the rabbit starts acting strangely, the Monroe dogs and cat renew their suspicions that he is a vampire.

**Award:** ABA Kids' Pick of the Lists; Young Reader's Choice Award/Nominee

**Topics:** Animals, Cats; Animals, Dogs; Animals, Rabbits; Horror/Thriller, Vampires; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Series, Bunnicula

## Main Characters

Bob and Linda the snooty dogs whom the Monroe pets know from a kennel

Bunnicula the quiet pet bunny of the Monroe family, who has much in common with vampires; he becomes depressed when his mother does not visit him on Mother's Day

Chester the Monroes' well-read and imaginative cat, who believes Bunnicula's strange habits are signs that he is an evil vampire who poses a threat to everyone; Chester is determined to keep Bunnicula under control

Felony and Miss Demeanor the two cats who help Harold and Howie break into the animal hospital

Harold the Monroes' easy-going, practical dog, who does not like change and tries to avoid confrontation; he finally decides he must stop Chester's plans when he begins to fear Chester might actually kill Bunnicula

Howie the Monroes' enthusiastic and talkative puppy, who idolizes Chester and Harold; he helps Harold search for Bunnicula when Bunnicula escapes

Mr. Monroe the kind-hearted father of the Monroe family, who often indulges the pets

Mrs. Monroe the considerate mother of the Monroe family, who struggles to understand what the pets are trying to communicate to her

Pete Monroe the inconsiderate eldest son of the Monroes, who frequently argues with his younger brother, Toby

Toby Monroe the intelligent and sensitive youngest son of the Monroe family, who always treats the pets kindly and becomes upset when the pets are not feeling well

## Vocabulary

**assault** attack

**befall** happen

**imperative** extremely important, critical, essential

**listless** tired, lacking in energy

**precipice** high steep point, often a cliff or a ledge

**scheme** plan

## Synopsis

One Friday a Monroe family dog, Harold, is disturbed by the death of a character in a book being read to him. This prompts him to be concerned for the well-being of his fellow pets: Chester the cat, Bunnicula the "vampire" bunny, and Howie the puppy. He finds them all safe, but when Chester reassures him that Bunnicula is under control, Harold worries that Chester has evil intentions towards Bunnicula.

On Saturday, the Monroes protest the upcoming demolition of the theater where they found Bunnicula. While they are gone, Chester suggests that Howie and Harold go out to play in the yard. Outside, Harold becomes suspicious of Chester, who is still in the house. When Harold and Howie rush into the house, they find Chester is stealing Bunnicula's carrot juice, causing him to weaken. Chester believes Bunnicula is up to something, and he plans to stop him. Harold notes that Bunnicula looks listless.

The next day, Harold notices that while he is singing to Bunnicula, Bunnicula is crying. He and Chester conclude that Bunnicula is depressed that his

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mother did not visit on Mother's Day. Together they search for Bunnicula's mother, though they have different reasons. Chester wants to keep mother and bunny from reuniting, while Harold wants to reunite them.

In town the Monroe pets meet two dog friends, Bob and Linda. Chester asks for their help finding Bunnicula's mother. Bob and Linda direct them to an alley where they saw a black and white animal recently. The animal, however, turns out to be a skunk. Chester escapes, but both Harold and Howie are sprayed.

After Mr. Monroe bathes the dogs, Chester suggests a night watch to monitor Bunnicula's activities. During his shift Harold realizes Bunnicula is seriously ill. He drags Toby Monroe downstairs by his sleeve to look at Bunnicula. Toby alerts his parents, and they take Bunnicula to the vet for tests.

Chester plans to follow Bunnicula to the hospital so that he can watch him. He disappears, and Harold and Howie find him howling with pain later. The Monroes rush Chester to the animal hospital and leave him there. They also take Harold and Howie in for a check-up.

At home Howie and Harold realize that Chester induced illness by eating a plant. Concerned, the two dogs go to the animal hospital. Inside, Harold and Howie find that Bunnicula has escaped. An old newspaper advertising a *Dracula* movie makes them realize that Bunnicula probably thinks his mother is at the theater. Harold refuses to help Chester escape so that he can pursue Bunnicula.

The next day, Harold overhears the Monroes again planning to protest the theater's demolition. The dogs hurry to the theater and get inside before the demolition begins. They see Bunnicula and soon realize that Chester is also there. The dogs watch horrified as Chester springs on Bunnicula; at that instant a wrecking ball comes through the wall and causes Chester and Bunnicula to fall. Howie and Harold run for their lives.

Outside, the dogs find the Monroes and let them know that they have friends inside the building. The demolition is halted, and the Monroes and their dogs find Chester howling on a pile of rubble. Chester asks Harold to help him find Bunnicula. When Bunnicula is unearthed, Chester shocks everyone by licking Bunnicula to comfort him.

After their traumatic experience together, Chester and Bunnicula become friends. Chester says this is because he realizes now that Bunnicula's powers as a vampire make him indestructible. Chester claims he can better watch him by being his friend, but Harold suspects that Chester has realized he actually likes the vampire bunny.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

How does Harold feel when he realizes that Bunnicula misses his mother?

*Harold feels sorry for Bunnicula because Bunnicula's mother abandoned him, and Harold thinks he should help Bunnicula find his mother. He is also worried that Bunnicula's sadness is contributing to his illness. At the end of the story Harold feels that Bunnicula missed his mother so much because Chester made him feel unwelcome. He hopes that Chester's new attitude towards Bunnicula will help prevent Bunnicula from feeling so homesick.*

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## Literary Analysis

What is unique about the Monroe pets and the way they are treated in the Monroe household?

*There are a few things that are special about the pets in the Monroe family. One is that all the pets can read and understand everything that humans say. The pets also seem to live very active lives, from Chester's plotting to Harold's writing to Bunnicula's vampire life. In addition, the Monroes seem to take their pets seriously. They try to treat them with respect, and they make an effort to understand what the pets are trying to communicate even if they often misunderstand them.*

## Inferential Comprehension

Why is Harold worried when Chester keeps saying that matters are under control with Bunnicula but refuses to explain what he means by "under control"?

*Harold knows that Chester believes it is his responsibility to keep Bunnicula from hurting others and that Chester takes this mission very seriously. Harold also knows that in the past Chester has shown little regard for Bunnicula's well being and is perfectly willing to harm Bunnicula if necessary. Harold does not believe that Chester is very reasonable when it comes to Bunnicula, and Harold does not want to see Bunnicula hurt.*

## Constructing Meaning

How does Chester convince Harold that Bunnicula misses his mother?

*First, Chester makes Harold notice that Bunnicula has been acting strangely: Bunnicula had a period of increased activity the two weeks preceding Mother's Day, followed by listlessness and depression after his mother did not visit. Then Chester points out that because Bunnicula missed his mother, he cried when Harold sang the lullaby.*

students break into groups of four and choose one of their favorite scenes from the book. Have them create a script from the text and give them paper bags and a cardboard box to use to create puppets and a puppet theater. Then allow them to rehearse several times before they perform their scene for the class.

**Recognizing Feelings** Bunnicula seems to have some very strong feelings about his mother. Have the students think about what Bunnicula might say to his mother if he could see her again. Then have them make a Mother's Day card from Bunnicula to his mother. The students can use pictures from a magazine, collage materials, or their own drawings to express the things Bunnicula might want to share with his mother.

**Making Predictions** At the end of this story, the main conflict between Chester and Bunnicula seems to be resolved, but the author does leave room for other story lines, such as the possibility that Bunnicula's mother may return or the possibility that Howie may become a writer himself. Have the students consider one of these options or an idea of their own. Then have them write a short story about what might happen to these characters after the close of this book.

**Understanding Characterization** All of the pets in the Monroe family have very different personalities. Have the students explore these personalities by choosing a character from the story and making a list of the things that character likes best and a list of things the chosen character hates the most. Have the students conduct a class discussion about why they think each of the characters has these likes and dislikes and what these preferences show about their characters.

## Teachable Skills

**Describing Actions or Events** This story contains several dramatic moments. Have the