

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Shadrach

by

### Meindert De Jong

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### Book Information

Meindert De Jong, Shadrach  
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182 Pages  
Book Level: 4.9  
Interest Level: MG

This beautiful story of a boy and his very special pet rabbit is told with a childlike perception and a sensitive understanding of a child's emotions.

**Award:** Newbery Honor

**Topics:** Animals, Rabbits; Family Life, Pets;  
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### Main Characters

Davie a young boy who learns to care for his rabbit

Father Davie's father, who skips church with Davie to help fix Shadrach's hutch

Grandma Davie's grandmother, who helps Davie bury his sacks of clover in the compost heap

Grandpa Davie's grandfather, who buys the rabbit for Davie

Mother Davie's mother, who insists that Davie rest to get well

Rem Davie's older brother, who sometimes causes trouble

Shadrach Davie's pet rabbit

### Vocabulary

**bloat** to swell or inflate

**domain** ownership and right of property

**hollow** having a gap, or space, within

**hutch** a pen, or coop, for small animals

### Synopsis

Davie is a young boy living in the Netherlands who has just gotten over a very serious illness. His mother constantly worries about him and tries to keep him indoors as much as possible. However,

Davie's grandpa has promised him a black rabbit. The rabbit is to arrive in one week, and Davie is overcome with excitement. In his zeal for the new pet, he sneaks out and fills three large sacks with tall red clover. After he slips down a bank and gets his foot wet in a drainage ditch, his older brother Rem finds him. Rem tells him his new rabbit will bloat and die if Davie feeds it the red clover. When they return home, Davie is punished for sneaking out and worrying his family.

The week passes slowly. When the day finally arrives, Davie rushes to meet Maartens's cart, which is bringing his new pet to him. He follows the cart through the streets and spies his mother. She tells him she was excited about seeing the look on his face, so she had to come. Maartens reaches into the back of the cart and pulls out a little black rabbit, which Davie has already named Shadrach after a game he used to play with his father.

Davie and Shadrach become good friends, yet one day Shadrach escapes from his hutch. Davie and his father skip church in order to fix Shadrach's hutch to prevent further escapes. Soon, Davie begins to worry when he notices Shadrach is not growing. Shadrach escapes again, and Davie realizes that Shadrach's slenderness allows him to climb out between the bars of his hutch. He is confused because he has taken very good care of his little rabbit. Davie and his grandpa decide Shadrach is fed too often and needs to learn to appreciate his food. When Davie sneaks a dandelion to Shadrach, he notices the rabbit just sits on it.

The next day Shadrach is gone. Davie searches everywhere for him, but the little rabbit is nowhere to be found. During his search, Davie mistakes a rat for Shadrach and grabs it. He brings it into his grandparents' house where his grandpa pries his fingers away from the animal. His mother insists he lie down and, during his rest, he hears his father's plan to get him a replacement rabbit. Remembering the secret room his grandfather showed him, Davie searches in the depths of the barn. He enters the room and spots Shadrach eating out of an old bag

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of oats. When his family comes to find him, Davie is so full of joy he can barely talk. As the story ends, Davie sings to himself the words of a hymn that shows he thinks of his family members as the "fairest of ten thousand."

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

Davie tells his father he believes his mother wants to keep him sick and baby-like. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

*Davie's mother is constantly worried about her little boy. She had been forced to deal with the possibility of losing him, and she does not want to go through that again. She does not want to hinder his maturing, but she wants to do everything she can to ensure his health and well-being.*

### Literary Analysis

Davie claims he does not want another rabbit. He decides Shadrach should be his only pet. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?

*Some students will agree with Davie's grandfather, who said animals that are alone all the time get lonely for a friend of their species. Many animals do seem to be lonely without companionship. Some students, on the other hand, may feel that another rabbit will force Davie to split his time and his affection.*

### Inferential Comprehension

Davie and Rem are brothers. They each have a different role in the family. How would you describe their roles?

*Rem likes to be the protective, but teasing older brother to Davie. He finds Davie when he sneaks away to pick clover. Rem tells Davie everyone is worried about him. He also helps Davie by drying his shoes and socks so he would not get in trouble. However, Rem also causes trouble. He likes to tease and taunt his younger brother, especially when it comes to Davie's rabbit. Davie is the baby of the family. He has been ill for a long time and is finally recovering. His family coddles him, for they are afraid he will get sick again. Though he tries to be independent by seeking answers on his own, he always comes back to his family for reassurance.*

### Constructing Meaning

Davie and his family have to work together in order to help his rabbit. Based on what you have read, what do you think would have happened to Shadrach if Davie's family had not been so supportive?

*Davie is a very resourceful young boy. It is possible that by seeing his rabbit eating the oats in the secret room, he would have learned oats was an important part of its diet. However, Davie, being such a young child, may not have had the knowledge or resources to take good care of Shadrach without his family's support.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** Davie and his family live in the Netherlands. Ask your students to find the Netherlands on a map or globe. Have them research this area. How is it like the region where they live? How is it different?

**Making Predictions** At the end of the story, Shadrach is found eating oats from a bag in the secret room. From this, the reader can assume he will start to gain weight and grow. Ask your students to draw a picture of what Shadrach will look like in six months. Then ask them to write a

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short paragraph at the bottom of their picture about the rabbit. Imagine how he feels. Is he happy?

**Recognizing Details** Davie's grandfather shows him a secret room in the back of the barn. The room contains many interesting objects from his grandfather's youth. Ask your students to create a map of the barn and have them include the secret room. Then ask them to list all the objects that were stated to be inside it. Have the students add five things they think might be in the room also.

**Responding to Literature** Owning a pet is a big responsibility. Davie has to prepare for the arrival of his rabbit by making a hutch and getting food for Shadrach. Ask your students to create a short story in which they can have the pet of their choice. They should include how they will prepare for the animal and what daily routines they will encounter. Have them research the animal in the library and create a drawing to go with their story.