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APPENDIX

A. Synopsis of the Novel *Mrs. Frisby and The Rats of NIMH*

A widowed rat mother, Mrs. Frisby is a field mouse who lives with her family in a cozy cinder-block house in the middle of a farm. The family calls this house their winter-house and they move into it when the forest gets too cold for their chilly little mouse noses. Mrs. Frisby's husband died mysteriously last year, which makes winter an especially hard time for the Frisby farm. But luckily, Mrs. Frisby is good at making a little food go a long way. Mrs. Frisby goes out to search for breakfast and finds a whole bunch of corn and seeds in a stump. Yum. Who needs Pop-Tarts?. Just when things are going so well, Mrs. Frisby learns that her youngest son, Timothy, is too sick to get out of bed. Good thing she bought all of those tiny lozenges, huh? Theresa worries that Timothy will not be able to get out of bed in time for Moving Day, which is a Big Problem. Even though she is worried about Timothy, Mrs. Frisby knows that she has to go back to the stump to collect the rest of the food. Maybe Pop-Tarts would have been easier after all. When they return, Mrs. Frisby is horrified to see how much worse off Timothy is.

Mrs. Frisby decides that she must leave immediately find Mr. Ages, who—she hopes—will have medicine that can save Timothy. Mrs. Frisby makes the long, dangerous trip to Mr. Ages' house. As she travels, she worries about all the creatures in the woods that could be a danger to her, but especially about cats. She knows what everyone else does: evil lurks in their hearts. When Mrs. Frisby arrives at the shoebox-sized house where Mr. Ages lives, the old guy's not home.

So she waits. And when he finally gets back, he's happy to help Mrs. Frisby. But gives her some sad news, too: it sounds like Timothy has pneumonia.

He gives Mrs. Frisby three little packets of medicine to give to Timothy and tells her how important it is to keep him warm and still. Mrs. Frisby leaves for home feeling somewhat relieved, but still worried about how she will keep Timothy warm enough in this cold winter weather. A mother's work is never done. Mrs. Frisby faces a tough decision: she can go home the long way, which will mean she won't get home till after dark. Or, she can go home the short way, which will put her near the cat that all the creatures fear.

Being a brave lady, Mrs. Frisby decides to take the shortcut home, so that she can reach Timothy sooner. Before Mrs. Frisby travels very far, she hears a strange squawking sound. It's a crow tied to a tree, and totally stuck. Crows like to mess around with shiny things almost as much as we like to eat cheese here at Shmoop. This means they really, really like shiny things, and this crow is no exception.

She briefly considers leaving the guy, but knows that if she does, he will die. When she is halfway done untying him, the crow sees Dragon—the evil cat. Worse, Dragon sees him and starts towards them very slowly. Eeek. Finally Mrs. Frisby gnaws through the string and frees the crow, saving him from certain death. A mouse with a heart of gold—our hearts are melting (but in that good way). Is yours? She tells him to make like a banana and split, but he refuses, knowing that Dragon will happily make a snack out of her just like he would of him. Interspecies friendships? Always a win in Shmoop's book. The crow's

solution? He tells Mrs. Frisby to jump on his back and together they escape from Dragon. The crow thanks Mrs. Frisby as he drops her off at home and tells her his name is Jeremy. In the end, each animal saves the other: Mrs. Frisby saves Jeremy's life, and Jeremy helps Mrs. Frisby get home to Timothy quickly and safely. The next time one of your friends goes and gets herself stuck to a fence, remember this wise lesson: if you set her free, she may give you a piggyback ride later.

Wins all around. Mrs. Frisby arrives home to find all of her children huddled around Timothy, worried about his sorry state. She gives Timothy his first dose of medicine and he immediately falls into a snoozerific sleep. By the third day, as Mr. Ages predicted, Timothy seems to be out of danger. Hurrah! Let's all breathe a collective sigh of relief. On the fourth day of Timothy's illness, Mrs. Frisby goes outside for food and notices how warm it is. On one hand, she knows this is good: Timothy needs the warm spring air. On the other hand, warm weather means Mr. Fitzgibbon's plow. Yikes. Mrs. Frisby goes into stealth-mouse-mode and hides in a fence post, trying to observe the tractor and avoid Dragon's observation.

Mr. Fitzgibbon backs the tractor out of the barn (cue doom and gloom music) and soon his son Paul appears outside to help him. Billy, the younger son comes out and Mrs. Frisby expresses her dislike for him because he throws rocks at animals. We're shaking our fists in solidarity. The humans start to check out the tractor, while Mrs. Frisby waits with baited breath. Then, there's lots of clanking (and probably some grunting and back-slapping) as the men look inside the

tractor. Mrs. Frisby is terrified that they are going to start plowing that day. The tractor starts to move forward... and dies. Phew! Universe, you are most kind and generous and also lovely.

The linch pin is "sheared" off, which means the FitzGibbons will have to order a new one. That's good news for our mouse friends, since it buys them some time: the last time they had to order a new one, it took five days to arrive. Five days is better than nothing, but it's definitely not long enough for Timothy to get well. Mrs. Frisby realizes she has to go back to Mr. Ages for more medical advice. She climbs out of her hole and sees Dragon looking at her. Amazingly, the cat doesn't pounce. Mrs. Frisby wonders if he is sick? But, hey, she'll take it—she's not looking this gift cat in the mouse. In the distance, she sees a "troop" of grey figures marching. Rats! (No, not rats like, "Gee whiz!" Actual rats. Marching rats.) They're moving a piece of cable into the ground in a long assembly line. Yup, you read that right: an assembly line. That doesn't exactly sound rat-like. Meanwhile, Dragon sleeps on. Zzzzzzzz...snort...zzzzzzzz....

Mrs. Frisby searches for some corn for supper before she heads home and spies a shiny piece of foil. Three guesses who's messing around with that foil. You are so smart. When she sees Jeremy examining the foil, she decides to ask his advice about Moving Day. Mrs. Frisby asks Jeremy why he likes shiny things so much and he admits that he brings them to a female crow, who also likes shiny things. Ah, young love! After listening to Mrs. Frisby explain the trouble with Moving Day, Jeremy is sympathetic. But does not know how to solve her problem. Luckily, he does have one piece of advice: he tells her that when the

birds do not know what to do, they go see Owl. Mrs. Frisby is afraid of Owl, but she realizes that she has to take any opportunity available to help Timothy. Jeremy tells her he will bring her to the Owl and they make a plan to meet at her house at 5 pm.

Jeremy arrives promptly at 5 pm and Mrs. Frisby introduces her to her children (except for Timothy, who is sleeping). Cynthia's afraid of Jeremy. (He is twenty times her size, after all.) Not surprisingly, Mrs. Frisby is terrified at the idea of flying on Jeremy's back, but he tells her there is nothing to worry about and that he makes the trip all the time. (Um, with his wings.) As she gets ready to leave, she tells the kids not to wake Timothy and not to tell him where she's gone if he wakes up on his own, as she doesn't want him worried. Whoosh! Off they go. Mrs. Frisby is petrified with fear as the ground rushes away and her poor heart pounds in her chest. From this distance, Mrs. Frisby can see the river, the fields and the forest. Too bad she forgot her camera, huh? She is sort of embarrassed at how little she knows of the geography, because she only moves around in such a small area. They arrive at an old tree and Jeremy lands on a branch.

The Owl asks "Who is standing outside my house?" (Or, maybe he said "Whoooo Whooo is standing outside my house." We aren't sure.) Jeremy explains that he has brought a friend with him, which prompts the Owl to ask why a crow would help a mouse. Fair question. So Jeremy tells the story of Mrs. Frisby rescuing him, and the Owl seems interested in a mouse who would risk her life for a bird—just curious enough, in fact, that he offers to chat with Mrs. Frisby, rather than, you know, snack on Mrs. Frisby. She's scared, but she enters his nest inside

the tree. Gulp. It is dark and bare in the nest. The Owl tells her she may "state her problem."

When Mrs. Frisby is finally introduced to Nicodemus, one of the respected leaders of the rats. Mrs. Frisby was told that her husband had helped the rats escape through the ventilation system at NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) and continued to help them by drugging the cats whenever they wanted to work on the farm, until finally he met his death in the Jaws and Claws of the Cat Dragon. Furthermore, Nicodemus also recounts flashbacks of rat history, occurring as rats decoded and learned to read, thus allowing them not only to read instructions to open the cage door but also ensure they escaped from the NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health).

In the end, Nicodemus was further agitated as the colony continued to rely on stealing even though they were intelligent. Stealing generates boredom and anxiety: "We don't have enough work, because their lives are always based on other people's work."

Nicodemus wanted the rats to live without stealing. So he devised a plan that required the rats to break all ties to a comfortable lifestyle in a rose bush and migrate to a remote area called Thorn Valley, where the rats used their intelligence and began growing their own food and living as independent creatures.

The thriller of the rats escaping right in front of the exterminator invasion from the NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health) is an example of how brave, and ingenious the rats and Mrs. Frisby are in solving their problems

dominates this book. In the book, the reader makes many discoveries, together with Mrs. Frisby, she studies the answers to questions about her husband and rats. However, Jenner, one of the rats who opposed Nicodemus' leadership, had his own plans.

Jenner didn't want mice to move away from the comfort and convenience of creatures in rose bushes. In the original storyline she disagreed with Nicodemus and the majority consensus on moving to Thorn Valley and chose to go with a small group of her followers because the rose bushes would be destroyed when the others left. The successful removal of Mrs.'s wooden block house. Frisby and the rat's terrible and heroic escape to Thorn Valley dominate the concluding chapter of the book.

In Robert O'Brien's story, rats have a much better image. Instead of behaving like rodents, they speak English, get married, have human names, and sit down on benches in order to read books. When young Isabella comes into a room, she is carrying a pencil and Looking at some papers as she walked. This is no hurrying, scurrying rat: the picture is closer to an attractive, educated young woman. Just as Anna Sewell's noble horse character Black Beauty talks like a sensitive young Victorian, Robert O'Brien's rats come over as decent, family-loving humans in rat disguise. It is easy for us to side with them in their tussle against their worst oppressors: human beings in their own skins.

The writer often enjoy books that show the human race in an unflattering light. We always learn something from such fiction, ending up with a better view of our own faults as seen from the point of view of smaller beings. Mrs Frisby and the

Rats of NIMH also teaches us to be more tolerant of other forms of life on this small planet: a lesson even more relevant now than it was in 1971, when the book first came out. All creatures play a part in our environment: scavengers such as vultures and jackals who, like rats, are also often given bad parts in stories, in fact have an important job to do clearing up after other animals.

We also know how clever and ruthless humans are when pursuing their own ends. Any animal that still manages to give us a good fight cannot help winning our respect, So the rats' escape from the laboratory and Mrs Frisby's last-minute rescue from her cage are both nail-bitingly tense, given the odds against them. No one grudges the rats their happy ending, finally escaping from an experimenter who simply wants to use them for cold-blooded scientific research. It may still be difficult for most of us to change our minds permanently about rats after finishing this story. But no reader will ever feel the same about field-mice again, having come across such a great-hearted little creature as Mrs Frisby herself.

It is always sad when a good story ends, especially when there are still some details that remain unclear. Which rats did not finally make it and how successful was the new civilization at Thorn Valley? Fortunately, two sequels are available, answering these and other questions and written by the author's daughter Jane Conly, so readers can discover more about Justin, Brutus, Timothy Frisby and Jeremy the crow. This means there are still plenty of exciting adventures to come, again often to do with the continual struggle between animals and humans for the world's remaining resources, so vital for all forms of life.

Source: <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/rats-nimh/summary>

B. Biography of Robert C. O'Brien

Robert Leslie Carroll Conly (January 11, 1918 – March 5, 1973), better known by his pen name Robert C. O'Brien, was an American novelist and a journalist for National Geographic magazine.

Early life

Conly was born in Brooklyn, New York, the third of five children in a wealthy Irish Catholic family. With interests in music and literature, Conly entered Williams College in 1935 but left in his second year. He then went through a period that he referred to as his "breakdown", briefly working in Albany, New York, before going back to his family in disgrace. Although he later studied for a time at Juilliard, he went on to receive his Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Rochester in 1940.

Writings Journalism

After his university graduation, Conly had a brief stint in an advertising agency, and then began working for Newsweek. He was ineligible for conscription during World War II, as unfit due to physical and mental ailments (classification 4-F in later terms). He then covered national and city news for the Washington Times-Herald beginning in 1944 and later the Pathfinder, a news magazine. In 1951, he began working as an editor and writer for National Geographic, a job which was to take him around the world. From 1970 until his death he was a senior assistant editor there.

Fiction writer

In the 1960s Conly developed glaucoma. Because he could no longer drive to work, he and his family moved in 1963 from Virginia closer to his office in Washington, D.C. In the time he saved from not having to commute, he began to write children's stories.[Conly is best known for writing novels under the name "Robert C. O'Brien", from his mother's maiden name, used because his National Geographic contract "forbade him from publishing with any other company".

His first books were the children's stories *The Silver Crown* (1968) and *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971). He won the 1972 Newbery Medal for the latter and his comments at the American Library Association annual conference were read by his editor Jean Karl to preserve his anonymity. According to Sally Conly, his last two novels, *A Report from Group 17* (1972) and *Z for Zachariah* (1974), were intended for adults. After his death in 1973, Sally and their daughter Jane finished the latter novel using his notes so it could be published posthumously. *Z for Zachariah* received a 1976 Edgar Award for Best Juvenile Mystery from the Mystery Writers of America.

Jane Leslie Conly later published two sequels to *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*: *Racso and the Rats of NIMH* (1986) and *R-T, Margaret, and the Rats of NIMH* (1990).

Personal life

Robert Conly married Sally McCaslin in 1943. The couple had four children, three daughters and a son. The marriage lasted until his death from a heart attack thirty years later in 1973. Mrs. Conly has written about her husband under the name Sally O'Brien.

Published books

All are novels published as by Robert C. O'Brien.

- a. *The Silver Crown* (Atheneum Books, 1968)
- b. *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (Atheneum, 1971)
- c. *A Report from Group 17* (Macmillan, 1972)
- d. *Z for Zachariah* (Atheneum, 1974)

Source : Chalmers, S. A. (1992). *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH: A Journey for*

Children. Indiana: Ba