

**GREGOR THE OVERLANDER
BY SUZANNE COLLINS**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grade 6-8**

Submitted by Bonnie Ellis, School Librarian
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Title: Gregor the Overlander
Author: Suzanne Collins
Publisher: Scholastic, 2003
Pages: 320

Summary

Gregor loses sight of his little sister in the laundry room of his apartment building, and when he finds her she is crawling into a grate behind the dryers. Just as he grabs her, they are both sucked into the grate and fall down, down, down, finally landing in the dark "Underland" beneath the city. There a strange race of very pale humans co-exists beside races of giant bats, giant cockroaches, giant spiders, and—giant rats.

Gregor's father has disappeared, and Gregor has taken on a number of household tasks to be of help to his mother, including laundry and babysitting his two-year-old sister. One day, while doing the laundry in the basement of his apartment building he loses his baby sister and sights her just as she is crawling into a grate behind the dryers. Just catching hold of her, they are both sucked into the grate.

They seem to fall forever. Gregor tries to convince himself it is just a dream, but then they land. When Gregor looks up he is face to face with the largest cockroach he has ever seen. The four-foot tall cockroach is standing on its hind legs, holding a torch, and it speaks to him. The cockroach takes a liking to Gregor's little sister Boots and transports them to Regalia, inhabited by a race of humans with purple eyes, silver hair, and translucent skin.

The Regalians think that Gregor is a warrior who has come to fulfill an ancient prophecy, "the Prophecy of Gray," and will deliver them from their sworn enemies, a race of vicious, giant rats. Gregor seems unable to convince them he is not a warrior, but when he learns that his father has preceded him into the Underland, he knows that he must try to find him. He sets out on the quest with Boots and Underlanders Luxa and Henry, mounted on giant bats. Along the way he finds his father and discovers that there are villains and traitors, as well as heroes and allies, in both the Underland and the Overland.

Author Biography

Suzanne Collins is a prolific writer for children's television. She has written episodes of Nickelodeon's "Clarissa Explains It All" and "The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo." She has also written stories for the Emmy-nominated "Maurice Sendak's Little Bear" and "Oswald the Octopus." Recently, she was Head Writer for Scholastic Entertainment's "Clifford's Puppy Days."

The author lives in New York City with her family. She says she was thinking one day about *Alice in Wonderland* and was struck by how strange the rural setting must seem to urban children "who are much more likely to fall down a manhole than a rabbit hole", and this train of thought led to the beginning of the *Underland Chronicles*, her first foray into publishing for young adults. This is scheduled to be a five part series. Two of the titles are already in print, and one is scheduled for publication in July of 2005.

Other Books by the Author

Gregor the Overlander and the Prophecy of Bane

Gregor and the Curse of the Warmbloods (scheduled for release 7/1/2005)

Fire Proof (part of "The Mystery Files of Shelby Woo" series)

Related Titles

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

Beyond the Burning Lands series by John Christopher

Beyond the Western Sea by Avi

The Blue Sword by Robin McKinley

The Chanters of Tremaris Trilogy by Kate Constable

The Children of the Lamp Trilogy by P. B. Kerr

The Children of the Red King Quintet by Jenny Nimmo

The Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis

The Circle Opens Quartet by Tamora Pierce

Cold Tom by Sally Prue

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White

The Dark is Rising series by Susan Cooper

The Devil's Toenail by Sally Prue

Dragon's Blood by Jane Yolen

Dragon Rider by Cornelia Funke

Earthsea Quartet by Ursula Le Guin

The Echorium Sequence by Katherine Roberts

Eragon by Christopher Paolini

The Game of Sunken Places by M. T. Anderson

The Giver by Lois Lowry

The Guardians of Ga'Hoole series by Kathryn Lasky

The Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling

Heart's Blood by Jane Yolen

The Hero and the Crown by Robin McKinley

His Dark Materials trilogy by Philip Pullman
The Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien
Inkheart by Cornelia Funke
The Keys to the Kingdom series by Garth Nix
The Land of Elyon Trilogy by Patrick Carman
The Magic Circle Quartet by Tamora Pierce
Midnight Magic by Avi

Perloo the Bold by Avi
The Prydain Chronicles by Lloyd Alexander
Redwall series by Brian Jacques
A Sending of Dragons by Jane Yolen
Spellfall by Katherine Roberts
The Thief Lord by Cornelia Funke
Through the Looking-Glass by Lewis Carroll
Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt
A Wrinkle in Time series by Madeleine L'Engle

Classroom Connections

- See the **Scholastic Discussion Guide** listed in web links for numerous ideas for discussion and curriculum-related activities.
- Coordinate the use of this book with the world history teacher in connection with a study of **mythological heroes who attempt a quest**, perhaps Jason or Hercules. Students can draw parallels between the journeys and the tasks these heroes were required to perform and the tasks and journeys that Gregor had to attempt.
- Use this book as part of a study of **quests depicted in fantasy literature**. Begin with the parallel Suzanne Collins drew between *Gregor* and *Alice in Wonderland* and move on to consider Madeleine L'Engle's "Time Quartet" (*A Wrinkle in Time*, *A Wind in the Door*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, and *Many Waters*.)
- Compare Gregor's quest with **quests in classical children's literature** such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *Ring Trilogy* or Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The film versions of these titles may be useful here.
- Have the students study **caves and underground cities**. Have them discuss and write about what it would be like to live in such a place.
- Have the students do research on the different types of **animals** depicted in the story.
- Two titles on the LYRC Ballot 2006 are about underground worlds. Have the students **compare and contrast** *The City of Ember* and *Gregor the Overlander*.

Web Sites

Scholastic: Discussion Guide and Booktalk for *Gregor the Overlander*

<http://www2.scholastic.com/teachers/authorsandbooks/teachingwithbooks/producthome.jhtml?productID=13816&collateralID=12933&displayName=Discussion+Guide&displayName=Discussion%20Guide>

or try www.scholastic.com

Click on “Trade Books” in sidebar. Then click on Discussion Guides. This will take you to the page with list of authors. Scroll to Collins. From the Discussion Guide click on Booktalk to find Joni Bodart’s excellent booktalk.

Suzy Red “Kids Wings” Research Links for *Gregor the Overlander*

<http://suzyred.com/2005gregor.html>

This site includes links to information about caves; the New York underground; underground cities, specifically Cappadocia; the Empire State Building; spiders and related fiction titles.

Alice in Wonderland Lesson Plan

<http://school.discovery.com/lessonplans/programs/alice/>

This lesson plan includes discussion questions, a reading list, vocabulary, and activities that can be incorporated into the classroom with the book.

The Mythology of the Constellations

<http://www.comfychair.org/~cmbell/myth/myth.html>

Contains an overview of the mythological significance of constellations. Descriptions of the major constellations are given by clicking on the names. From there you can click on the constellation name to get a further description.

Mythweb

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

This site is devoted to the gods and heroes of Greek mythology. It also includes a section about the relevance of learning Greek mythology in today’s world.

The Quest for *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*

<http://drb.lifestreamcenter.net/Lessons/planet/index.htm>

Site contains information for teachers about *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*.

A Quest for *A Wrinkle in Time*

<http://drb.lifestreamcenter.net/Lessons/Wrinkle/index.htm>

Features lessons for the classroom to go along with *A Wrinkle in Time*.

The Tesseract: A Madeleine L’Engle Bibliography in 5 Dimensions

<http://hometown.aol.com/kfbopfql/LEngl.html>

Features related links, bibliography, and news about Madeleine L’Engle.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz Website

<http://www.eskimo.com/~tiktok/>

Includes interesting information about the world in the *Wizard of Oz* – the movie and the novel. Also, the site contains lesson ideas for teachers.