

Gooseberry Park

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Genre: Animal fantasies are a rich genre for early novels. In these books, the animals have some human traits (they talk, they form friendships, and sometimes they wear clothing), but they retain a good portion of their animal characteristics as well (they sometimes tend to eat one another, for one thing). Name some other animal fantasies you have really enjoyed.

Friendship: This animal adventure features the most unlikely group of animal friends that I have run across in a while: a squirrel, a dog, a bat, and a hermit crab. Stumpy's dog friend, Kona must rescue her and her children with the help of scatterbrained Murray the bat, and the advice of Gwendolyn, the sage old Hermit Crab. What made the animals' friendship so unique? Do people have the same kinds of friendships? Who was your favorite character? Why?

Nesting instincts: The book starts with an introduction to the nesting instinct in squirrels-- squirrels because Stumpy the squirrel is having babies and needs to find a place for them all to live. Have you ever heard the term "nesting instinct?" Do people have this same instinct?

Weather disasters: Shortly after the babies are born, an ice storm blows havoc through the town and especially Gooseberry Park. A pin-oak tree topples over, casting the squirrel family and many other animals into danger. Did this disaster seem real? What made it so scary?

Animal safety: Stumpy disappears, leaving her friends Kona the chocolate Labrador retriever and Murray the bat, assisted by Gwendolyn the hermit crab, to find Stumpy's babies and care for them until Stumpy can be found. How did Kona accomplish this amazing feat?

Recycling: In the story a Stumpy builds a nest for her expected babies with odd bits and pieces she finds in dumpsters and other places. What was her real "treasure"?

Animal characters: These characters are full of kindness, selflessness, loyalty, bravery and humor. Give an example from the book that shows one of these virtues?

Humor: What did you think was funny in this book?

Criticism: In this story, the babies get no role at all, and, of course, Stumpy is missing for half the book. Do you think the book would have been better if the babies had personalities and action? Why? What would you have had them do if you were the author?

Plot manipulation: Professor Albert is the only human character in the book. His chief skill is that he can be counted on to fall asleep often. I could really identify with Professor Albert. He really only has that one skill, but he does it so well. Why did the author give him this characteristic?