

Sample Written Analysis—*Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*

(Quadrant 1)

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh, by Robert C. O'Brien, **tells the story of** a field mouse who must find a way to rescue her children from certain death. The story takes place at the end February, just as the frost is melting on the farm. In two weeks or less, Mrs. Frisby and her four children will have to move from their warm cinderblock house in Farmer Fitzgibbon's vegetable garden to their summer house. Then, Timothy gets pneumonia and is in bed with a fever. Mrs. Frisby makes a dangerous journey to Mr. Ages' house for medicine. He tells her that it will be at least three weeks before Timothy is fully recovered. He must stay inside and not be exposed to cold air or else the pneumonia will come back, and he will most likely die. Mrs. Frisby is sick with worry. Her friend Jeremy the crow agrees to take her on his back to see the owl. At first, the owl does not have any good advice for her, but when he learns that she is Jonathan Frisby's widow, he tells her to go to the rats and ask them to move the house to a safe place away from the plow. At the first plot point, Mrs. Frisby decides to ask them because "there isn't anyone else to ask" (p. 57).

Throughout the first quadrant, **the author creates a mood** that is both positive and negative by setting the story at the end of Winter. At first, Mrs. Frisby feels cheerful that Spring is coming. But the plow is coming, too, and the feeling of worry and dread makes the atmosphere of the story feel threatening. Mrs. Frisby worries that her problem is like a door that cannot be opened. **Will Mrs. Frisby learn to stop worrying about the closed door and accept that the only way to open it is to find the key?**

(Quadrants 2 and 3)

Soon after visiting the owl, Mrs. Frisby goes to the rosebush to see the rats. At the entranceway, she encounters the biggest rat she has ever seen. Just when the rat refuses to let Mrs. Frisby in, Mr. Ages comes out of the tunnel. He is surprised to see Mrs. Frisby but agrees to take her to see Nicodemus, the leader of the rats. After listening to her story, Nicodemus agrees to help move Mrs. Frisby's home. After all, Jonathan Frisby was one of Nicodemus's closest friends. They will move the house at night, but first they will need to put sleeping powder in the cat's bowl. Mrs. Frisby volunteers even though she could be killed. She is shocked to learn that her husband died doing the same thing! Now Nicodemus must tell Mrs. Frisby how he became friends with her husband. The story begins when he is captured and sent to a laboratory. He and the other rats are part of an experiment. They are given injections of DNA, and this makes them smart. **At the midpoint**, one of the rats tries to escape and finds the mice. It is clear that this is the moment Nicodemus meets Jonathan.

Time passes, and the rats learn how to read and how to open their cages. The rats form an escape plan and make it out with the help of two brave mice, Mr. Ages and Jonathan Frisby. Together, they move into an abandoned mansion where they eat well and read the many books found in the study. When they leave the mansion, the rats decide to search for a cave where they can live safely. While searching, they find a truck full of electric motors and tools that were designed for working on toys. They decide to move to a cave near Mr. Fitzgibbon's farmhouse and tap into the electricity and plumbing. Now the rats were "stealing more than ever before; not only for food, but for electricity and water" (p. 168). **At the turning point**, they tell Mrs. Frisby about their plan to move to Thorn Valley to build their own rat civilization and be truly free.

Across the story, the author uses fantasy **symbolism** to show that ordinary individuals, like Mrs. Frisby, can rise to greatness when called to act. The story takes place in the garden and in the forest,

and this natural world represents mystery and danger. When Mrs. Frisby feels worried or anxious, that darkness is overcome by light. When she feels trapped by her circumstance, she finds the key and enters the unknown. “She remembered again what her husband had said—how easy to unlock a door when you have a key” (p. 89). By showing bravery and being willing to face trials and sacrifices, Mrs. Frisby saves her family and gains new friends.

(Quadrant 4)

As the story concludes, Mrs. Frisby puts her life on the line when she takes the sleeping powder to Dragon’s bowl. Before she can get back to safety, Mr. Fitzgibbon’s son catches her and traps her in a birdcage. She hears the farmer announce that exterminators are coming to the farm to kill the rats. Thankfully, a rat named Justin rescues Mrs. Frisby, and she is able to warn Nicodemus. **At the resolution**, the rats move Mrs. Frisby’s house before moving to Thorn Valley. When Timothy’s health improves, the mouse family moves to the summer house, and it is there that Mrs. Frisby tells her children the story of their father and the rats of NIMH.

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH is a quest **story, starting with** Mrs. Frisby’s urgent need to protect her son **and continuing with** challenges and risks along the way. **The mood changes across the story from** threatening, dangerous, and mysterious **to** hopeful and optimistic. **The message of the story is** that ordinary individuals can rise to greatness when called to act. Mrs. Frisby was desperate to save her son, and this act of love gave her the courage to face challenges and overcome them.

Sample Written Analysis—*One Wrong Step*

(Quadrant 1)

One Wrong Step, by Jennifer A. Nielsen, **tells the story of** a teen named Atlas who goes with his father to Mount Everest. The story begins in 1936 when Atlas is almost twelve years old. He is climbing to the top of his first mountain summit—King’s Peak. Unfortunately, that same day his mother dies. Since then, he and his father have hiked to the top of five different summits around the world. Now, his father will join a team of British climbers who are hoping to be the first team to reach the summit of Mount Everest. At the same time, it is rumored that German Nazis may also be on the mountain, trying to beat the British to the summit. Atlas is worried about his father’s safety but also angry with his father for leaving him behind. His father believes that Atlas is not ready to make the climb because he makes mistakes in critical situations. Atlas must wait for his father at Advanced Base Camp and communicate with the team using a packset (like a walkie-talkie). He is not the only one waiting at the camp. A girl named Maddie who is about Atlas’s age is also there waiting for her father to return. **At the first plot point**, Atlas and Maddie hear a loud bang and then deep rumblings coming from the mountain. It’s an avalanche! Atlas tries to communicate with the team using the packset, but all he hears is static.

Throughout the first quadrant, **the author creates a mood** that is threatening, dangerous, and mysterious by setting the story at the base of Mount Everest. The mountain is massive and majestic with “. . . enormous structures of ice and rock . . . some so tall that the threat to our lives literally [hovers] above us” (p. 48). As they prepare to climb the mountain, their lives are threatened several times, first when the ice cracks below Atlas’s feet, then when a yak falls through the ice, and finally when two of the men fall while climbing North Col. The mood is also mysterious. Mr. Blake writes secretly in his leather notebook, and an unrecognizable footprint makes them all suspicious of Nazis. **Will Atlas learn to stop being afraid to make mistakes and instead do the right thing when it matters most?**

(Quadrants 2 and 3)

After the avalanche, Atlas is determined to find out whether the climbing team is still alive—he will not leave them stranded. He hopes that if they position themselves closer to the team, they will be able to reach them using the packset. He convinces Maddie and Chodak (one of the Sherpas) to climb North Col. It will be a challenging and dangerous climb, especially with Chodak’s injured hand and Maddie’s fear of heights. With Chodak leading the way, they climb the steepest part of North Col and reach the crevasse. Here they must walk across a horizontal ladder from one side to the other. Atlas goes first, then coaches Maddie across. As they continue to climb, Chodak injures his foot, and Atlas must lead them to the top where tents and supplies await them. When they wake up in the morning, they hear an SOS message coming through the packset. **At the midpoint**, Atlas is resolved to climb Mount Everest and rescue the team even after others warn him that it is a mistake.

With a new sense of hope, Atlas, Maddie, and Chodak begin the climb to the North Ridge. Only Atlas is certain they made the right decision. Maddie and Chodak worry that they should turn back. “One life should not be traded for another” (p. 168). As they climb North Ridge, Maddie slips and pulls everyone down with her. Chodak can no longer put weight on his foot, and he must turn back. He agrees to go to Camp Four alone while Maddie and Atlas continue to make the challenging climb. When they successfully make it to the top of several boulders, they are met with a blizzard. The blinding snow makes it impossible to see their way forward, and Maddie leads them to cliff’s edge. Instead of freezing like he would have before, Atlas carefully guides Maddie to

safety. They make it to Camp Five and hear a voice on the packset. When they ask who it is, the answer is “Blake.” Was it Blake or was it someone else giving them a warning? Atlas sleeps uneasily, worried about who might be on the mountain with them and in pain from a terrible headache. In the morning, they continue to climb while suffering from altitude sickness. After crossing a crevasse, Atlas falls and is hanging on the side of a cliff. **At the turning point**, Atlas decides he wants to keep climbing, but it will be up to Maddie to save him.

Across the story, the author uses coming-of-age **symbolism** to reveal Atlas’s true identity. The physical journey up Mount Everest reveals Atlas’s will to live, even after his mother’s death. The unpredictable storms on the mountain represent the storms of life. In life, “. . . you can never see all the dangers, and there are more of them than you think.” Atlas learns that life isn’t perfect and that he will make mistakes, but it is worth living to its fullest.

(Quadrant 4)

As the story concludes, Atlas must be willing to accept help from others if he wants to save the lives of the team trapped under the snow. After Maddie rescues him from a near-death fall, they find Mr. Blake—one of the team members Atlas suspects is working for the Germans. He tells them where the team is buried before continuing down the mountain to get help. Maddie and Atlas make it to Camp Six and try to get some rest, but they are suffering from elevation sickness and keep coughing. In the morning, they hear Atlas’s dad on the packset before it goes dead. They are more determined than ever to reach the team. Eventually they reach the hole where the team is buried, but just as they begin to dig, Atlas passes out. The next thing he knows, he and the team are being carried on backboards down the mountain. They have been rescued by the Sherpa rescue team. **At the resolution**, Atlas and his dad return to London where they both contribute to the war effort. Atlas will never forget the lessons he learned on Mount Everest.

One Wrong Step is a quest **story, starting with** Atlas’s journey up Mount Everest to rescue his father **and ending with** his own rescue. **The mood changes across the story from** frightening, dangerous, and mysterious **to** hopeful and optimistic. In the beginning, Atlas was looking for peace at the top of every summit. But while climbing Mount Everest he learned that true peace comes from within. **The message of the story is** that life is like a journey up a mountain, full of storms and obstacles, but the point is to keep climbing upward, only looking back to see how far you have come.

Sample Written Analysis—*Harriet Tubman*

(Quadrant 1)

Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad, by Ann Petry, tells the story of Harriet Tubman, a brave woman who rescued hundreds of people from a life of slavery. The story begins in 1820 in Dorchester County, Maryland, where Harriet was born into slavery. Life is hard for the slaves, especially after Denmark Vesey is hanged for attempting to start an insurrection. Slaves cannot travel without a pass, be caught talking to other slaves, or sing songs about freedom. When Harriet is six years old, she is hired out to work for a weaver. There she is treated harshly and eventually becomes sick with the measles and bronchitis. She is hired out again, this time as a child's nurse. Harriet is severely whipped every time she lets the baby cry. Finally, Harriet begins working in the fields; and even though it is hard work, she enjoys it. "She [feels] free in the fields." **At the first plot point**, Harriet refuses to help an overseer tie up a runaway slave. Instead, she blocks the overseer's way, allowing the slave to flee. When the overseer throws a two-pound weight, it hits Harriet in the forehead, and she nearly dies. She prays that God will change her master's heart or kill him, and when her master dies, she is conscience-stricken.

Throughout the first quadrant, **the author creates a mood** that is threatening and dangerous by describing the horrors and injustices of slavery as seen through the eyes of a child. "Harriet, like the rest of the children . . . [was] always a little hungry, not starving, but with an emptiness inside that was never quite assuaged." Hired out at a young age, slave children learned to obey their masters or be punished harshly. They bore the scars of slavery while dreaming of freedom. **Will Harriet allow the scars of her past to define her or will she transform them into a source of strength?**

(Quadrants 2 and 3)

After her master dies, Harriet is allowed to hire her time cutting timber, hauling logs, and plowing fields. She works with her father, Ben, and he teaches her "wood lore"—which berries were good to eat, which plants could be used for medicinal value, and how to move through the woods without making a sound. "He was in his own fashion, training her for the day when she might become a runaway . . ." (p. 76). In 1844, she marries a free man named John Tubman. She worries that she will be sold, and she and John will be separated. Eventually, she escapes alone with the help of an organized people on the Underground Railroad. In Philadelphia, Harriet is a free woman, but she is lonely and misses her family. With the help of the Vigilance Committee, Harriet returns to Maryland and guides her sister's family to freedom. Later, she returns to get John, but he has remarried and refuses to go with her. **At the midpoint**, Harriet chooses to rescue a small group of slaves whom she does not know, demonstrating her willingness to risk her life for the larger cause of freedom.

For the first time, Harriet understands what it means to truly be free. She believes that slavery is morally wrong and is determined to rescue as many slaves as she can from Dorchester County. "Her knowledge of the route was so sure she could go North rapidly now, knowing all the stops along the way, where it was safe to spend the night, which houses would provide a warm welcome" (p. 117). Harriet guides a group of eleven slaves north, and this journey takes her almost a month. As soon as she is able, she returns to Maryland and brings nine more slaves to freedom. In 1854, Harriet returns to rescue three of her brothers. Soon, she is a legend in the slave cabins, and they refer to her as Moses. Each trip she makes on the Underground Railroad is a risk and a sacrifice, but to Harriet freedom is worth dying for. **At the turning point**, Harriet makes her most dangerous journey North, knowing that there is a \$12,000 reward for her capture and that if she is captured, she will surely

be hanged. She is easily recognizable because of her scars, but she uses her scars as a reminder of her purpose, and they give her strength.

Across the story, the author uses coming-of-age **symbolism** to reveal Harriet's inner indomitable strength. The physical journey to the North on the Underground Railroad represents her journey to self-discovery. She learns to trust her instincts and to pray to the Lord for strength. The bandana she wears on her head represents maturity and a right-of-passage into adulthood. She learns to trust her visions, which represent her unique abilities. The seasons of the year become the map of her life—she works in the summer and winter and rescues slaves to freedom in fall and spring. Each time she travels toward an uncertain future, risking her life for freedom.

(Quadrant 4)

As the story concludes, Harriet returns to Maryland to rescue her parents, who are now too old to make the journey on foot. Despite these challenges, Harriet is determined to bring them to freedom in the North. They settle in Auburn, New York, and Harriet sacrifices her own comforts to care for them. During this time, she becomes a tremendously successful speaker at antislavery meetings. She shared her stories, “telling about the trips she made back into slave country, how she carefully selected the slaves that would go North with her, how they traveled mostly on foot, wading through rivers, hiding in haystacks, in barns” (p. 204). In 1860, Harriet made her last rescue trip. Shortly after, the Civil War began, and she became a scout, spy, and nurse for the Union forces. **At the resolution**, the Civil War has ended, and slavery is abolished. Mrs. Sarah Hopkins Bradford, a friend of Harriet's, writes the story of her life. Harriet Tubman dies on March 10, 1913, and will forever be remembered as “the longest conductor on the Underground Railroad, the railroad to freedom . . .” (p. 241). She led more than three hundred slaves out of bondage and is known as the Moses of her people.