



The Real Thief

William Steig

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Gawain the goose is really devoted to King Basil the bear and so he takes his job as Chief Guard of the Royal Treasury seriously. When rubies, then gold ducats, and finally the world-famous Kalikak diamond vanish from the treasure house, there is no way to account for the disappearances. Only Gawain and the King have keys!

Woe and misery must be borne--by Gawain, by King Basil and the entire community, as well as by the real thief--before the goose's good name is restored. Brought to trial, Gawain escapes from his faithless friends into lonely self-exile. Now the thief, burdened by guilt, sees that the right thing must be done and determines, heroically, to do it. (Setting all this straight is no small job for one mouse, even such a mouse as Derek.)

William Steig's many admirers will find in *The Real Thief* a book worthy of standing beside "Dominic" and "Amos and Boris."

The Real Thief Details

Date : Published December 1st 1984 by Farrar Straus Giroux (first published 1973)

ISBN : 9780374462086

Author : William Steig

Format : Paperback 58 pages

Genre : Childrens, Picture Books, Fiction, Fantasy

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From Reader Review The Real Thief for online ebook

Anne says

I enjoyed coming across and reading this unfamiliar, short chapter book by one of my favorite authors. Very Steig - he always pleases. DRA 50, by appropriate for a much younger audience.

Matt says

This is a very well-told morality tale. I read it over a few nights to my kids, and they appreciated the story--even the courtroom justice section--they knew all the characters well, and were glad to hear it each night. I was wondering if they got the lessons that the story conveyed, so the day after we finished it I asked them all sorts of questions: what did we learn from this story? who was right? who was wrong? what could this character have done differently? and so on. Lo and behold, they got it! They learned some great lessons from this unassuming tale.

Chris says

Crossposted at The Fish Place.

This is a story about Gawain the goose who is accused of stealing from the kingdom's treasury. You would think the bear king would eat him as punishment, but he doesn't. It is a rather simple tale, but truly charming. Lovely illustrations, and I like the decorating.

Nevada Libert says

this book has lots of honesty in it, i love how the thief was sorry for what he had done, and how sorry he was when sorrow was brought to there city to there city.

Barbara says

As a teacher of elementary students, this may have been my favorite book for literature study. Rich with language, symbolism, themes and characterization, there is a lot to talk about with kids. As always, Steig captures the drama and challenge of real situations in ways accessible for kids without writing down to them. His use of language is always something easily noticed for young readers and creates a perfect opportunity to help students value the word choice skills of wonderful authors.

Michael says

It's a kids book with cute animal characters, and yet, the story is genuinely wrenching. It's amazing how

simply and subtly Steig gets across things like pride, guilt, resentment, loneliness. Of course it was funny too. Even learned a few words. Recommended for anyone.

Chris says

One of the best children's books I have read in years. If you want your kids to be inspired to be good, toss out your Bible and slip them this gem. This book really demonstrates what it is to be good and how that it is not something you will always be praised for and sometimes you may find people falsely accusing you of being bad, but in the end you will (hopefully) prevail.

LinMarie says

The rich vocabulary makes this a great read-aloud for a 9-12 year-old class. Though it looks like a book for younger children (being short and having a personified goose on the cover), *The Real Thief* raises thought-provoking questions that can spark deep discussions. In general, the 6th graders found more to disagree with than the 4th or 5th, primarily the author's idea of friendship--that true friends would not doubt one's innocence when charged with a crime. The 6th graders could see that it is all too possible for one of their friends to have done wrong, and that true friendship doesn't mean blind trust. Our discussion turned to the nature of friendship, and how to be a true friend to someone in trouble. The 4th and 5th graders focused more on the benefits of admitting fault and how concealing wrong-doing just leads to more problems. None were satisfied with the ending, although for different reasons--some found the pace shift too abrupt; others disagreed with the main characters' final action. As a means of revealing the developing moral character of the children, *The Real Thief* remains a favorite on my read-aloud shelf.

nicole says

"One by one, Gawain's friends took him aside to ask his forgiveness, and he freely forgave them. He was able to love them again, but he loved them now in a wiser way, knowing their weakness." pg 57

Connie says

Read aloud Max and Henry. Wonderful words.

Ellice says

It's no surprise that the illustrations in this book by William Steig, a cartoonist for the *New Yorker*, are just perfect. However, the text is also pretty darned good, and the interplay between the two is wonderful. I appreciate that in this children's book, Steig uses complex words, like "perjury" and "haphazard" and "plectrum." There is also a lot of subtle, wry humor here. A great tale.

Jennifer (JenIsNotaBookSnob) says

This was more of a book I liked rather than a book I loved. Gawain the goose is falsely accused of a crime he did not commit and the first part of the book is from his point of view. After he is found guilty and escapes, the book continues from the perspective of Derek the rat. Derek is the real thief and didn't believe that Gawain would be convicted because of his good reputation. When it happens anyways, Derek is left feeling very guilty that Gawain is convicted of a crime that Derek committed.

This is a rather short chapter book with some illustrations. There are a lot of opportunities to discuss this with kids. I loved this site for questions: <http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy...>

Julesmarie says

I'm curious at all of the reviews saying this is a good morality tale. Can it be a morality tale if nobody learns from their mistakes and everyone ends the book practically right where they started?

Gawain avoided being wrongfully punished by escaping. Derek avoided being punished by putting back all of the things he took. Everyone magically forgot about the crime just because the things were returned. Gawain was never actually proven innocent, but people forgave him anyway and he got his job back.

Is it Gawain forgiving everyone who wrongfully accused him and believed him guilty that people think is the moral here? Maybe I'm just too cynical to appreciate this, but that just seemed foolish of Gawain.

And I fail to see how this could actually be considered a children's book, given the vocabulary in it. When my class read this, I had to spend so much time discussing vocabulary that we weren't even able to get to what the story was actually about (perhaps a blessing in disguise?). I almost hate to be saying this, because I love words. I love learning new words and I love teaching my students fun new words. But putting so many of them into a sentence in a children's book that children are left unable to even use context to figure out their meaning just seems ridiculous.

Yes, it was a cute story, but ultimately pointless. And stuffed with enough difficult words that it becomes almost inaccessible to children unless read aloud.

Matthew says

Gawain the guard is admired by many people in the kingdom. Especially the king. The king loves Gawain. Everyone looks up to him. Gawain is proud that he is chief of the guards. But 1 day the king's the treasure(some of it) is stolen. Since Gawain is the only one besides the king who has the key to the treasure is accused. No one understands why he would do this. He escapes from the courtroom and flies away in despair encountering many problems along his way. The real thief Derek. He is a mouse who is able to fit in tiny holes so he got in. He realizes that he made his friend suffer and ruined his life. So he steals more treasure after Gawain is gone so the kingdom knows Gawain didn't steal. Derek also goes to fine Gawain in his hiding. H ethen leads Gawain back. They go back fighting against many obstacles. When they get back the kingdom returns to happiness. And the king likes and loves Gawain again. Derek never reveals that he stole so still no one knows.....

Heather says

Another intriguing story line from William Steig which gave us a great discussion time together one afternoon. It made for a great plot to ask "should questions" from since the plot involves something being stolen, someone being accused, and someone hiding the truth. It always amazes me how much we get out of a story when we start to think about the story in this way. These chapter books by Steig are short, illustrated and easy to read, yet the story is rich with ideas.
