

# The Amazing Bone

William Steig

FIELD GUIDE



## Book Summary

Pearl the Pig is enjoying a lovely spring day as she walks home from school. She lingers in town watching the folks at work and play; she lingers in the forest appreciating the flowers and the warm air. As she says aloud "I love everything," she hears an answer, "So do I" and finds a magic, talking bone. She rejoices in her find, and she and the bone, dropped by a grumpy witch a long time ago, chat as they start home. Suddenly, robbers jump from behind a rock and try to steal Pearl's purse. The bone imitates wild animals and scares them away. Pearl and the bone laugh and continue on. Then Pearl is grabbed by a fox who wants to eat her for dinner. The bone imitates a crocodile, but the fox is too smart to fall for the trick. He takes Pearl and the bone home and lights a fire on which to cook them. Just in the nick of time, the bone remembers a spell used by the witch. Using the spell, he makes the fox the size of a mouse so he can't hurt them. Pearl is delighted and takes the bone home to live as a member of her family.

## Illustrator

William Steig

## Publisher

Sunburst, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976

## ISBN

0374403589

## Basic Book Information

This is a picture book with William Steig's classic style of both wiggly-line illustration and fun-with-words, fantastic writing.

## Noteworthy Features

Many teachers like to read Steig books aloud to their students because they are so whimsical and unusual, and because teachers themselves love the books. This one in particular has a high level of drama-robbers attack, and Pearl trembling as the fox stokes the fire and makes a salad to eat her with. There is usually enough dialogue to make voices in the reading of the story, too. In this one there is the voice of Pearl, the bone (even casting a spell), and the fox. It can be valuable for a class to see an adult revel in the language, humor, and fun of a book, especially a book they too can enjoy.

One of the most common ways that teachers use William Steig's books is for teaching children to read books that contain hard vocabulary words in them. Since children tend to love the stories in his books, there is motivation for them to work out ways to read with the tough vocabulary he always uses. Sometimes teachers give each book club a Steig book to read and then the readers come together to discuss the ways they found to manage the tough words.

## Teaching Ideas

Learning to understand a new word from context is not automatic. Many readers come to a dead stop in their reading when they get to a word they

don't know. They don't realize that to understand the word it is usually necessary to keep reading for a little while, until the rest of what the line or sentence or paragraph or page is trying to say becomes more clear. Sometimes, reading beyond the words makes the word's meaning exactly clear, and sometimes it only makes it clear within a wide range of meanings. Readers need to learn that, usually, arriving at that wide range of meanings is quite enough, and that further thinking about the word will interrupt the story too much. If children are studying the book in depth this isn't true, of course, but for a general, for-the-story read, this is quite enough for the majority of real-world readers.

Of course, for an in-depth study of any book, children also will need to learn other ways of finding out the meanings of unknown words, from asking a friend to using the dictionary or computer. Steig books can be good subjects for this kind of work.

Some kids like to wonder about the messages of the book. Is the author telling us not to dawdle in the woods or it will be courting trouble? Is he telling us to have hope because friends and help can come from even the most unlikely places? Is he saying that youth and a lust for life will always survive in the end? Is he just presenting a fanciful tale so we don't let our imaginations wither away? Some readers find it very difficult to find messages in Steig's work, and perhaps this makes them all the more fun and interesting and unpredictable.

Steig has written numerous other wonderful children's books, the most highly acclaimed being *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*. None of his books shy away from unusual and specific vocabulary words that tend to delight (and sometimes confound) both young and old readers. The books often contain an element of magic to enjoy, and the characters are often animals. All the books have his characteristic wavy-line drawings. All his characters, even the humans, are quirky and have interesting emotions. Almost all of the books are witty and humorous for all ages of readers. All of them have happy endings. Readers who are launching themselves on an author study may well find all these things out, and more, on their own. They may want to include some of his cartoons from the *New Yorker* magazine in the body of his work that they study—some have humor accessible to young readers.

### Book Connections

If the magic or the big, bad fox were the appealing elements of the story to the reader, those elements can be found in many fairy and folk tales, from *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Three Little Pigs*, to any of the three-wishes-type stories.

### Genre

Picture Book

### Character's Gender

Female

### Teaching Uses

Independent Reading; Read Aloud; Interpretation; Author Study