



Public
Libraries

Poppy

by Avi

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Summary

At the very edge of Dimwood Forest stood an old charred oak where, silhouetted by the moon, a great horned owl sat waiting. The owl's name was Mr. Ocax, and he looked like death himself. With his piercing gaze, he surveyed the lands he called his own, watching for the creatures he considered his subjects. Not one of them ever dared to cross his path. . .until the terrible night when two little mice went dancing in the moonlight. . .

Poppy the deer mouse urges her family to move next to a field of corn big enough to feed them all forever, but Mr. Ocax, a terrifying owl, has other ideas.



About the Author



I was born in New York City on December 23, 1937, along with a twin sister. I am five minutes older than Emily. It was Emily, for reasons no one knows — she certainly doesn't — who called me Avi. It stuck. It's the only name I use now.

My father was a doctor, and my mother, later on, became a social worker. Every night I was read to. Every Friday we were taken to the library. I always received at least one book for my birthday. I have a few of them yet. Early on, I had my own collection of books. I loved to read. Still do.

I came from a family of writers, artists, and musicians. And today we have all that, plus filmmakers, actors, and theater and TV directors. (Two of my sons are in the rock music world. The third is a journalist.) When we get together there is much talk, disagreement, and laughter.

Growing up in Brooklyn, I went to a public school, and sat in the same class with my sister until eighth grade. I hated that. My older brother was considered a genius. He isn't, but he did go to college at the age of 15. My sister was very smart too. Guess who wasn't thought to be that smart?

When I went to high school I wanted to be a designer of airplanes. But flunking out of the science high school brought me to a small private school that provided some of the attention I needed. I got it when an English teacher insisted I get some help with my writing.

I did get help, and that help led me to think that I might become a writer. I made up my mind to focus on this when I was 17 and a senior in high school.

I began by writing plays, and wrote a lot of bad ones. It was only when my eldest son, Shaun, was born, that I took to writing for kids. Since then, I've never written anything else. My first book was published in 1970. I've published over 30 books since then.

For some 25 years I worked as a librarian, first at the New York Public Library, then at Trenton State College in New Jersey. My life has always been with, around, and for books.

"I want my readers to feel, to think, sometimes to laugh. But most of all I want them to enjoy a good read."

Though the topics and the style of Avi's books range widely, one common thread unites them: They are all invitingly readable, even to the most reluctant readers. Avi explains, "I take a great deal of satisfaction in using popular forms — the adventure, the mystery, the thriller — so as to hold my reader with the sheer pleasure of a good story."

Honored with the Newbery Medal for *CRISPIN: CROSS OF LEAD* and a Newbery Honor for *NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH*, Avi is the acclaimed author of several works of historical fiction, including *THE TRUE CONFESSIONS OF CHARLOTTE DOYLE* and *THE MAN WHO WAS POE*. Avi faced and overcame many difficulties in his effort to become a writer. He suffers from dysgraphia, a dysfunction in his writing abilities that causes him to reverse letters or misspell words.

"In a school environment," Avi recalls, "I was perceived as being sloppy and erratic, and not paying attention." Still, in the face of unending criticism, Avi persevered. "I became immune to it," Avi says. "I liked what I wrote."

Now an award-winning author, Avi enjoys visiting schools. He identifies with children who are lonely, frustrated, and isolated. "I always ask to speak to the learning-disabled kids. They come in slowly, waiting for yet another pep talk, more instructions. Eyes cast down, they won't even look at me. Their anger glows. I don't say a thing. I lay out pages of my copy-edited manuscripts, which are covered with red marks. 'Look here,' I say, 'see that spelling mistake. There, another spelling mistake. Looks like I forgot to put a capital letter there. Oops! Letter reversal.' Their eyes lift. They are listening. And I am among friends."

http://www2.scholastic.com/teachers/authorsandbooks/authorstudies/autho_rhome.jhtml?1768&collateralID=5091&displayName=Biography



Book Review

From Publishers Weekly

Newbery Honor author Avi (Tom, Babette and Simon, reviewed June 12) turns out another winner with this fanciful tale featuring a cast of woodland creatures. As ruler of Dimwood Forest, Ocax the hoot owl has promised to protect the mice occupying an abandoned farmhouse as long as they ask permission before "moving about." Poppy, a timid dormouse, is a loyal, obedient subject-until she sees Ocax devour her fiance and hears the owl deny her father's request to seek new living quarters. To prove that the intimidating ruler is really a phony, Poppy embarks on a dangerous and eye-opening quest, which ends with her one-on-one battle with Ocax. While the themes about tyranny and heroism are timeless, Avi leavens his treatment with such 20th-century touches as Poppy's jive-talking boyfriend and Poppy's own romantic vision of herself as Ginger Rogers. An engaging blend of romance, suspense and parody, this fantasy is well-nigh irresistible. Illustrations not seen by PW. Ages 9-11. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From School Library Journal

Grade 3-5?A fast-paced, allegorical animal story. Mr. Ocax is a great horned owl who rules the mice who live around Dimwood Forest, preying on their fears by promising protection from the dreaded porcupine in exchange for unconditional obedience. Challenging his despotic authority is the smart-talking, earring-sporting golden mouse Ragweed, whose refusal to obey turns him into a meal for the owl. His timid sweetheart Poppy returns home, where she learns that a delegation must go to request permission from Mr. Ocax to relocate half of the mouse family as they have outgrown their present quarters. When he refuses, Poppy, inspired by Ragweed's independent thinking, decides to undertake the scouting journey to the proposed new home anyway, encountering along the way an irreverent porcupine who explains that he and his ilk are no threat to mice. Armed with Ragweed's earring, a quill sword, and the awareness of the owl's deception, she plans to expose Ocax as a cowardly bully. She finds herself in a fierce battle with him, resulting in his death and allowing for the mice's liberation. This exciting story is richly visual, subtly humorous, and skillfully laden with natural-history lessons. The anthropomorphism is believable and the characters are memorable. The underlying messages, to challenge unjust

authority and to rely on logic and belief in oneself, are palatably blended with action and suspense. Black-and-white illustrations are in keeping with the changing moods and forest locale. A thoroughly enjoyable book. Marie Orlando, Suffolk Cooperative Library System, Bellport, NY Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.



Discussion Questions

Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

- ◆ Do you think it was brave or do you think it was foolish of Ragweed to bring Poppy to an area that Mr. Ocax did not approve? Do you think taking a risk is being careless or does it bring excitement to your life?
- ◆ Do you think Mr. Ocax was a Bully? What characteristics does Mr. Ocax have that makes him a bully?
- ◆ Why don't the other mice like Ragweed? Do you think it was fair?
- ◆ What can happen if one questions authority? What characters question authority and what happens to them as a result? When would it be good and when would it be bad?
- ◆ Do you have anything in common with Poppy?
- ◆ Did you like the map at the front of the book? Did you look at it while you were reading the story? Was it helpful to you?
- ◆ Who do you think is the hero in "Poppy" and why? What characteristics do they have that make them a hero?
- ◆ What did you think of Ereth? Have you ever been afraid of something like Poppy was afraid of Porcupines and then found out there was really nothing to be afraid of?
- ◆ How did Poppy change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story?
- ◆ Has anyone read any other books in these series or anything else by Avi? What do you think will happen next in this story?
- ◆ Who was your favorite character and why?

- ◆ Did you like this book? Thumbs up or Thumbs down? If you didn't like it, why not?
- ◆ Search the internet for some interesting Owl and Porcupine trivia for some fun discussion. For example the scientific name for Porcupine is *Erethizon dorsatum*. This is where Ereth gets his name!

Some of the questions taken from:

<http://www.chariho.k12.ri.us/faculty/kkvre/units/2003/poppy/poppy.html>



Author Interview

When Were You Born?

1937, in the city of New York. I was raised in Brooklyn.

Where Did You Get That Name?

My twin sister gave it to me when we were both about a year old. And it stuck.

Why Don't You Tell Your Real Name?

The fact is, Avi is the only name I use.

What Were You Like As A Kid?

Shy, not into sports, but someone who loved to read and play games of imagination.

What Did You Read?

Picture books, then chapter books, comic books, and I listened to lots of kids' radio.

Were You A Good Student?

Not very. In elementary school I did well in science, but I was a poor writer. When I got to high school I failed all my courses. Then my folks put me in a small school which emphasized reading and writing. Even beyond that I needed special tutoring.

Then Why Did You Even Want To Become A Writer?

Since writing was important to my family, friends, and school, it was important to me. I wanted to prove that I could write. But it took years before I had a book published.

When Do You Become A Writer?

I think you become a writer when you stop writing for yourself or your teachers and start thinking about readers. I made up my mind to do that when a high school senior.

Did You Write Kid's Books Right From The Start?

I began as a playwright. Only when I had kids of my own did I start to write for young people.

Does Your Family Help You Write?

They help by supporting my efforts, not by giving me ideas, or suggesting changes.

Is Writing Hard For You?

Yes. But then it's hard for every-one to write well. I have to re-write over and over again so that on average it takes me a year to write a book.

Isn't That Boring?

If you do anything all the time it's nice to get away from it now and again. My hobby is photography.

Where Do You Get Your Ideas?

Everybody has ideas. The vital question is, what do you do with them? My rock musician sons shape their ideas into music. My sister takes her ideas and fashions them into poems. My brother uses his ideas to help him understand science. I take my ideas and turn them into stories. Now, what do you think you'll do with your ideas?

What's Your Favorite Book?

The next one.

Do You Have Any Advice For People Who Want To Write?

I believe reading is the key to writing. The more you read, the better your writing can be.

Anything Else?

Listen and watch the world around you. Try to understand why things happen. Don't be satisfied with answers others give you. Don't assume that because everyone believes a thing it is right or wrong. Reason things out for yourself. Work to get answers on your own. Understand why you believe things. Finally, write what you honestly feel then learn from the criticism that will always come your way.

From http://www.avi-writer.com/about_avi



Further Reading

If you liked **POPPY** by Avi,
you might like to read the following books, too!

Other books in the Poppy Series By Avi
The Mouse and the Motorcycle By Beverly Cleary
Tale of Despereaux By Kate DiCamillo
Hoot By Carl Hiaasen
Babe the Gallant Pig By Dick King-Smith
The Capture By Kathryn Lasky
Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nimh By Robert C. O'Brien
Angus and Sadie By Cynthia Voight