Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: The Squirrels Who Squabbled by Rachel Bright, Jim Field", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/557. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Rachel Bright , Jim Field

The Squirrels Who Squabbled

United Kingdom (2017)

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables Fable Phaedrus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Squirrels Who Squabbled
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Rachel Bright, *The Squirrels Who Squabbled*. London: Orchard Books, 2017, 29 pp.
ISBN	9781408340479
Available Onllne	Read through on publisher's YouTube channel (accessed: October 24, 2018).
Genre	Fables, Picture books
Target Audience	Children (c. 3–6)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowsk@gmail.com

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Creators



Rachel Bright (Author)

Rachel Bright is a British children's writer and printmaker based in Southern England. As well as writing children's literature, Bright also designs cards and gifts for the Brightside brand. She studied graphics at Kingston University, and followed this with a Master's Degree in Printmaking at the University of the West of England. Bright's books are aimed at young children and tend to emphasise the importance of emotional warmth, including the *Love Monster* series, and *Amazing Daddy*. She is the author of the Aesop's Fable-themed, *The Lion Inside*.

Source:

Twitter (accessed: October 24, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Jim Field (Illustrator)

Jim Field is a British illustrator based in Paris, France. He also works as an animation director and character designer. Field illustrated other works written by Rachel Bright: *The Lion Inside* and *The Koala Who Could*.

Source:

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Official website (accessed: October 24, 2018)

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Additional information

Summary

The Squirrels who Squabbled is a reworked retelling of the Aesop's Fable, *The Ants and the Grasshopper*. It is a highly illustrated work in rhyming couplets. The tale opens with the arrival of Autumn and news that all the animals are getting ready "for bed", i.e. for hibernation and Winter. The only exception, pictured blithely playing on a swing, is "Spontaneous Cyril", the squirrel. The reader learns that all the other animals have been busy gathering supplies to see them through winter and they are pictured gathering mushrooms and nuts. Cyril, however, has "adventured and partied" through that time because he lives in the "now and here". He has just realised that he has no supplies for Winter.

Cyril spots the last available pinecone and heads towards it to claim it. Another squirrel is also heading towards the pinecone, "Plan-Ahead Bruce", who has plenty of supplies but wants this final pinecone to complete his store. The pinecone drops from the tree and the two squirrels charge through the forest to collect it, through trees and rocks, past bears, along the river, until a bird sweeps in and carries it off. They find themselves suddenly in peril, swept over a waterfall. Cyril manages to grab a branch and pulls himself and Bruce to safety. On the bank, Bruce laughs and reproaches himself for "How greedy [he's] been". He declares that they should stop squabbling and celebrate their safety. All the woodland creatures gather together for a feast. Cyril and Bruce end the night sitting together in a tree eating some acorns having learned that the most important thing is "to share a laugh with your friend."

Analysis

The Squirrels who Squabbled is a lively retelling of the fable of the *Ants and the Grasshopper*, with large sumptuous images of wide-eyed cartoon animals against a rich background of reddening forest. Key aspects of the fable are communicated through the story, which makes it instantly recognisable as a retelling although there is no mention of Aesop and no active encouragement to recognise the connection or to explore antiquity further. The creatures have been changed from ants and grasshoppers to squirrels, perhaps because squirrels, as mammals, are more appealing to young children than insects and potentially more familiar within children's lived experience. The central conflict in the work is a clash of world views:

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whether it is better to live in the moment or to plan for the future. Cyril plays the role of the Grasshopper, and he quickly finds that his preference for living in the moment has left him vulnerable; he has nothing at the on-set of Winter, while those who have worked have plenty. Typically, this would be the point at which Cyril/Grasshopper realises that his short-term view is immature, with young readers learning the important lesson that it is good to plan for the future and to consider the long-term consequences of one's actions. Many modern retellings also include lessons about generosity towards the less fortunate (even towards those who have brought their misfortune upon themselves), so the Ants frequently help Grasshopper once they see his distress and accept that he has learned his lesson. *The Squirrels that Squabbled* diverges at this pivotal moment in the fable so that rather different lessons are drawn from the story.

It is noticeable that the child reader is encouraged to follow Cyril as the protagonist in the story. He is introduced smiling and playing at the start of the work; the reader sees his distress and then relief; it only then that the reader is introduced to the frowning Bruce, who is pictured carrying out a stock-take. Bruce, then, is presented as a rival to the reader's friend, Cyril. Ther rivalry over a single item is an element absent from the traditional fable. The Ants do not traditionally fight the Grasshopper for the last pinecone, and the depiction of this struggle extends sympathy for Cyril, who clearly has greater need than Bruce. The narrator criticises both of them for 'greed', which is rather curious when the animals are worried about starving to death, and seems to place a negative connotation on planning for the future. There is also a switch in the usual pattern of lesson learning. It is Ant/Bruce who experiences self-reproach and learns that he has been selfish. The response of the squirrels and the other animals is to eat into their stores at a feast. Grasshopper/Cyril seems to be having a lovely time at the feast and, later, enjoying the acorns and laughter with his new friend. Grasshopper/Cyril learns nothing about the perils of short-termism except perhaps that someone else will always be there to help out with some acorns. "Laughter" is the most important thing, not self-sufficiency or fairness.

If the key message of *The Ants and the Grasshopper* is the importance of foresight, the key message of *The Squirrels who Squabbled* is that sharing is important. It does this, however without providing much sense of *why* one should share and while representing foresight negatively. This is perhaps caused by the lack of emphasis on real conflict between the two; the squirrels compete for only one page of

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	the book; during the rest of their competition for the pinecone (when it falls off the tree, falls in the river, gets picked up by a bird), things are essentially out of their control and nothing would have changed if they had acted differently. Online reviews indicate that this is a popular book and that parents appreciate the emphasis on sharing. This element could perhaps be brought out further by adult readers through added emphasis and active questioning. The moral of the story is rather different from the traditional moral, but the story nonetheless works within the tradition that children's stories should contain moral lessons and that such lessons can be well-communicated via animal characters.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aesop Aesop's Fables Fable Phaedrus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Animals Character traits Conflict Emotions Friendship Gaining understanding Humour Judgement Learning Morality Peers Subjectivity Talking animals Values
Further Reading	*Babrius and Phaedrus Fables*, trans. B.E. Perry, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1965. Daly, Lloyd, R. (trans. ed.), *Aesop Without the Morals. The Famous Fables, and a Life of Aesop*, New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961. Hall, Edith, "Our Fabled Childhood: Reflections on the Unsuitability of Aesop to Children", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed. *Our Mythical Childhood… The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, Leiden: Brill, 2016. Hall, Edith, "Aesop the Morphing Fabulist", in Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt, eds., *Classical Reception and Children's Literature. Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation*, I.B. Tauris: London,

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