

## FUN FACTS ABOUT YE OLDE CHESHIRE CHEESE

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese | 145 Fleet Street, City of London, London

- Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese is a well-known pub that dates back to the 17th century. Although destroyed by a fire in 1666, the pub was rebuilt a year later and still remains a highly sought-after haunt for anyone interested in Old English fare and history. The first building on the site was believed to be a guesthouse for a monastery, which is where the vaulted cellars may have originated.
- Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese's ground floor consists of five bars and two dining rooms across the corridor, including The Chop Room. With so many dining rooms, rambling staircases, narrow corridors, and smaller rooms throughout, it's enough to temporarily confuse new visitors as well as regulars.
- Menu specialties include Ye Famous Steak & Kidney Pudding (with roasted potatoes), Scotch Roast Beef (with Yorkshire pudding and horseradish sauce), and Fish 'n' Chips, as well as sandwiches, salads, and Cheese & Biscuits for dessert.
- Well-known Cheshire Cheese literary patrons include Tennyson, Mark Twain, Voltaire, and Charles Dickens to name a few. Dickens hinted at the pub in his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*.
- With every generation that warmly embraces Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, its history, like cheese, becomes better with age.
- In England, pub is short for "public house" and traditionally was a place where ale could be drawn from a wooden cask. As they were in Dickens's day, pubs are still social places where many people go to spend an afternoon or evening talking with friends and enjoying restaurant-style meals and drinks, including tea and coffee.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Carmen Agra Deedy, a *New York Times* bestselling author, has been writing and traveling around the world telling stories for more than twenty years. Her books have received numerous awards and honors. She lives in Georgia.

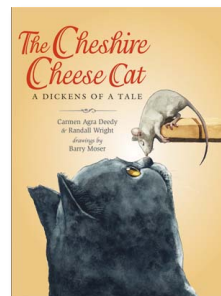
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Randall Wright is the author of several novels for young readers, including *A Hundred Days From Home*, *The Silver Penny*, and *Hunchback*, a VOYA Top Shelf Award winner. He lives in Utah.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Barry Moser is one of today's most celebrated illustrators of children's books. He is also a printer, painter, printmaker, designer, author, essayist, and teacher. The books Moser has illustrated and/or designed forms a list of over three hundred titles. He lives in Massachusetts. [www.moser-pennyroyal.com](http://www.moser-pennyroyal.com)

# DISCUSSION GUIDE



## The Cheshire Cheese Cat A Dickens of a Tale

Written by Carmen Agra Deedy and Randall Wright  
Illustrated by Barry Moser

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### ABOUT THE BOOK

Skilley, an alley cat with an embarrassing secret, longs to escape his street-cat life. Tired of dodging fishwives' brooms and carriage wheels, he hopes to trade London's damp alleyways for the warmth of Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese Inn. He strikes a bargain with Pip, an erudite mouse: Skilley will protect the mice that live at the inn, and in turn, the mice will provide Skilley with the thing he desires most. But when Skilley and Pip are drawn into a crisis of monumental proportions involving a tyrannical cook, an unethical barmaid, and a malevolent tomcat, their new friendship is pushed to its limits. The escalating crisis threatens the peace not only of the Cheshire Cheese Inn, but also the British Monarchy!

### THEMES

Friendship | Life in Victorian London | London/England/British history  
Cheshire cheese | Bartering | Bullying | Being unique/Self-esteem  
Charles Dickens's writings and biography

★“The fast-moving plot is a masterwork of intricate detail that will keep readers enthralled.... Language is a highlight of the novel; words both elegant and colorful fill the pages.... The book is a success in every way. It should be a first purchase for libraries interested in bringing young readers to the marvels of Dickens...” —*School Library Journal*, **Starred Review**

[www.cheshirecheesecat.com](http://www.cheshirecheesecat.com)



## HISTORY OF CHESHIRE CHEESE

The first mention of Cheshire cheese was recorded in an English survey in year 1086, making it one of the oldest named cheeses in British history. Cheshire was the most popular cheese on the market in the late 18th century. Dense, semi-hard, yet with a moist and very crumbly texture and mild, salty taste, Cheshire cheese, made from cow's milk, was first produced in the county of Cheshire and four neighboring counties in England and Wales. It is still produced in the county of Cheshire today.

In earlier times, due to slower transportation, Cheshire cheese had to sit and age until it reached a level of hardness, much different from the soft, fresher cheese of today. The trip from Cheshire to London (approx. 150 miles) made by horse and cart, prohibited the delivery of fresh Cheshire cheese, which didn't become the rage until the end of the 19th century.

Cheshire Cheese comes in three varieties—red, white, and blue. The traditional and best seller by far is the white, which is actually pale yellow.

### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Where did the story take place?
2. Why do you think Skilley took Pinch's idea to be a mouser at the Cheshire Cheese?
3. Why did Skilley not like doors?
4. What was Skilley's big secret? Why do you think he was embarrassed by it?
5. What was Pip's secret?
6. What kind of bargain did Pip and Skilley strike up and how did it benefit them both?
7. What famous authors enjoyed spending time at the Cheese during the timeframe of this story?
8. Why was Pinch allowed to be a mouser too?
9. Who is Maldwyn and why is he at the Cheshire Cheese?
10. Why do you think Pinch was so mean?
11. What did you think was the funniest part of the book?
12. Which character did you relate to the most? Why?
13. Who was your least favorite character? Why?
14. What was the plot (or main idea) of this book?
15. What were some problems in the book and how were they resolved?

### CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

#### LANGUAGE ARTS

- What happened at the beginning of the story, in the middle, and at the end? Teachers may have students sequence a chapter, a group of chapters, a character's scenes, or the entire book.
- How did the author help you understand what the bigger words in the book meant?

- Carmen Agra Deedy uses a lot of puns in her books. Cheshire Cheese contains many puns or play on words and phrases, i.e. "He was the best of Toms, he was the worst of Toms." Write three to five puns that were used in the book and circle your favorite. Try writing a pun of your own. Question: Does the author's play on words contribute to the mood of the story?
- Select several homophones (tail vs. tale, for example) and write two sentences using both words in their proper context.
- Choose your top five favorite words from the book and define and use each in a sentence. Also select the fanciest word, oddest word, most musical-sounding word, and hardest-to-pronounce word from the book. Write a sentence with one of the words and replace it with a synonym or antonym.
- Have students choose their favorite scene from the book and write their own script for that section.
- What books did Charles Dickens write and what were some common themes throughout his books? Were any of these themes present in *The Cheshire Cheese Cat*? Which ones?
- Read or watch movies based on Charles Dickens's books.
- Research the lives of the other writers at the Cheese who were friends with Dickens. Write a paragraph on each. Research the queen in the story and make a list of other royalty who were around during the time when the Cheese was first built, rebuilt, 100 years ago and today. Compare and contrast business, lifestyles, fashion, and writers from the Victorian era and the present.
- Create a top ten fun facts list about topics from the book. (cats, mice, ravens, cheese making)

#### SOCIAL STUDIES

- Think of something that happened to you that might have been similar to something that happened in the book. Some ideas: bullying, using someone else's idea, helping a friend, being embarrassed by a friend, having a secret...
- Bartering: Pip bartered with Skilley using cheese in exchange for protection. Think of other types of bartering in our history. Examples salt and gold used as money in ancient Mali, Native Americans traded jewelry and fur in exchange for guns from white settlers, farmers traded eggs for beef, etc. What types of bartering do we still do today? Do you trade any of your possessions with friends for something you prefer? What do you think our money system will be like in 100 years? Brainstorm different types of futuristic money or types of bartering.

#### COOKING/FOOD

- Have a cheese party with students. Ask students to have their parents send in a cheese from their local deli and enjoy cheese from around the world, including some Cheshire cheese. Enjoy with English tea and "biscuits" (shortbread cookies are a good choice).
- Chocolate Covered Cherry Mice Recipes: For some simple recipes, visit: <http://homecooking.about.com/od/dessertrecipes/r/bicandy25.htm>