

Mr. Popper's Penguins Study Guide

by Rebecca Gilleland

For the novel by
Richard & Florence Atwater

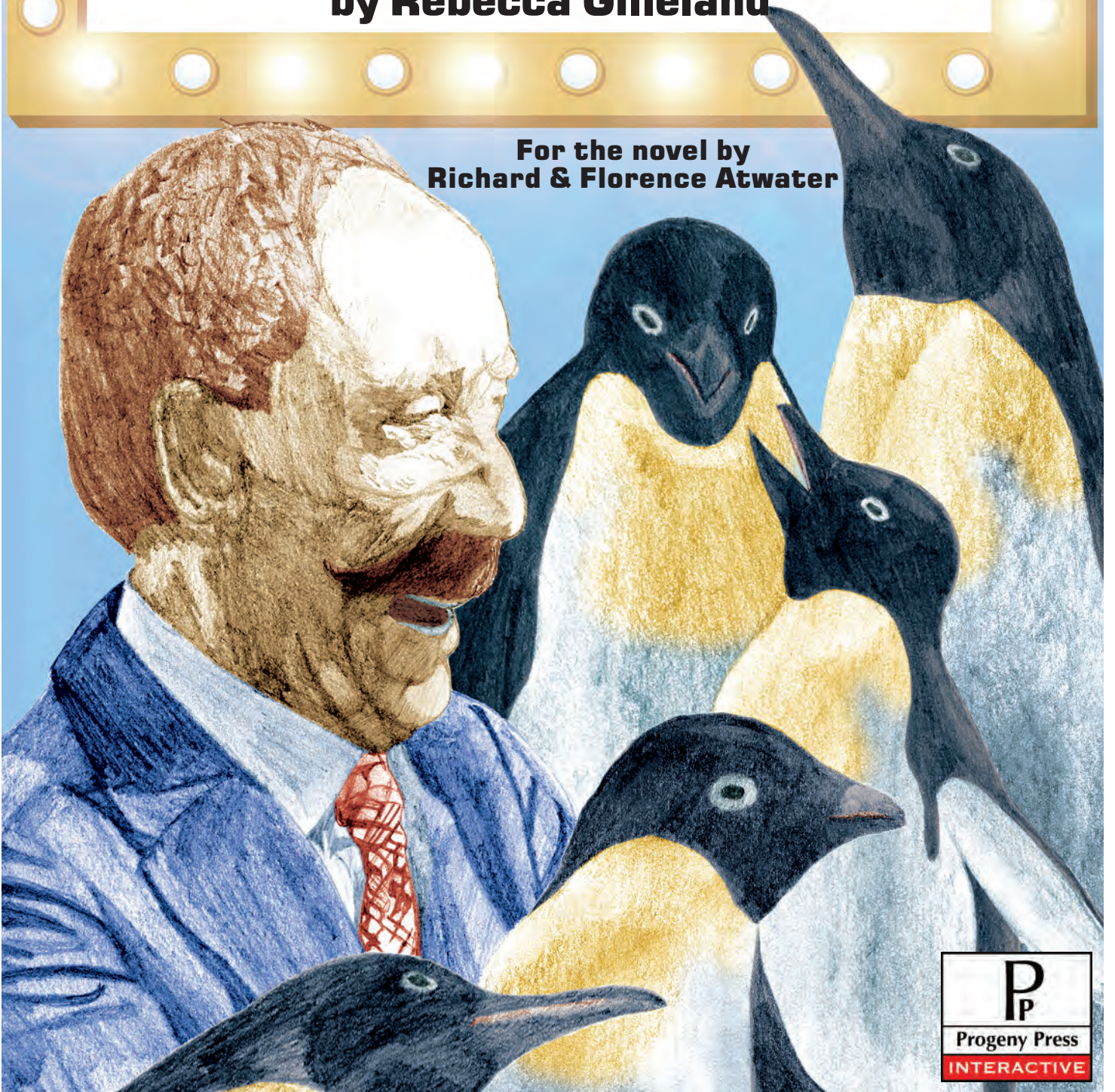


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Synopsis

Mr. Popper lives a sensible life as a house painter, but he often wishes he had seen the world before settling down—particularly the North and South Poles. As a busy summer season of work ends, Mr. Popper prepares to spend his off-season reading about the Arctic regions. He even writes to his favorite explorer, Admiral Drake. But he does not expect the answer that Admiral Drake sends—special delivery. With the arrival of a penguin, Captain Cook, life at the Popper's will never be the same!

When Captain Cook starts to get sick from loneliness, a zoo sends *its* lonely penguin, and now Mr. Popper has two! Soon Captain Cook and his new mate, Greta, lay eggs, and 10 new little penguins join the crowd. Complications set in as Mr. Popper, who doesn't have the money for roast beef or ice cream, starts buying shrimp for 12 penguins. Then he has the furnace moved and a freezing unit installed in the basement.

There is only one solution Mr. Popper can think of to pay the debts they owe: He'll begin a performing penguin act! So begins the family's adventures across the country, living in hotels, performing on vaudeville stages, and making enough money to pay their debts. But travelling can be exhausting, and near the end of their tour, Mr. Popper makes a terrible mistake. He takes them to the wrong theater, the penguins frolic with the seals, and chaos follows.

Luckily, as Mr. Popper and his penguins languish in jail, Admiral Drake arrives and rescues them. The family heads for home, but the story isn't over. Admiral Drake offers to take the penguins to the North Pole, and invites Mr. Popper to accompany them. Thus, one adventure rolls to a close as another begins for Mr. Popper and his performing penguins.

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Think About the Story:

6. How does Mr. Popper reassure Mrs. Popper that being out of school for 10 weeks is all right for the children? Do you think it is a good reason for missing school? Why or why not?

7. Why do audiences seem to like it when the penguins interfere with other acts?

8. An *idiom* is a saying common among a certain group of people, usually using word pictures to express another thought or idea. Generally the meaning of the saying is very different from the actual words of the saying. Some examples of idioms are:

“Turn over a new leaf.” (Meaning: start over or make a change in your life for the better.)

“It’s raining cats and dogs.” (Meaning: the rain is coming down hard.)

“Keep your fingers crossed.” (Meaning: hope for the best.)

At the beginning of Chapter XVI, the authors write,

Then Mrs. Popper had to scrub and polish and straighten the whole place, for she was much too good a housekeeper to leave everything at sixes and sevens while the Poppers were away.

What words in the sentence are part of an idiom? What do you think the idiom means? (Use the context of the sentence to figure it out.)

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Dig Deeper:

9. Mr. Popper involved his entire family in the solution to their lack of money. Read Ecclesiastes 4:12, Proverbs 17:17, and Psalm 133:1. How do these verses apply to Mr. Popper's solution for his family's money problems? Has your family ever had to work together to achieve something or solve a problem? What was it and what did you all do?

10. How did Mr. Popper decide what kinds of tricks to have the penguins perform? How would this make learning the tricks easier for the penguins and for the Poppers?

11. What things do you like to do and are you good at? Do you like to listen to people or talk to people? Figure out the fastest way to do something? Write or read? Fix things? Draw? Cook? Sew? Garden or work with animals? Under the heading "Things I Like and at Which I Am Good," make a list of at least five things that you like to do and that you do well. Under the heading "Chores at Home/School That Use These Talents," write several ideas about ways in which you could use your talents to help your family, school, or church. (For example, Do you always want to know what everyone is doing? Maybe you could help keep a class or family calendar.) Under the heading "Adult Jobs That Use These Talents," write down several ideas for jobs that use your talents. (For instance, do you like to try to make certain everyone understands exactly what you mean and sometimes get into arguments because of it? Maybe you would make a good attorney or teacher. Do you always want to know what everyone is doing? Maybe you could be a reporter.)

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13. No, the children are not polite or respectful to the police officer. When the police officer asks Mr. Popper what he does for a living, Janie interrupts her father and answers for him. When the police officer will not come in, Bill laughs at him and says he is afraid, mocking him. Bill also embarrasses his father by saying that his mother sometimes says that his father's hair looks like a lion's mane.

14. See also Matthew 15:16–19. We should let wisdom guide our speech because we will have to give an account of our words to God. We should not say bad, disrespectful, or mean things because God should be in our hearts and we should concentrate on and speak what is true, right, and kind. Answers may vary about the way the Poppers acted. They did not act terribly, but they were not as respectful to each other as they should have been. Actually, the police officer was the most respectful and nicest person during their conversation.

Chapters IX–XII: “In the Barber Shop,” “Shadows,” “Greta,” “More Mouths to Feed”

Vocabulary:

1. *spectacle*: show; 2. *mopey*: sad; 3. *stupor*: numbness; 4. *solemn*: serious; 5. *plunge*: dive; 6. *toboggan*: slide; 7. *aquarium*: water tank

Questions:

1. Captain Cook climbs all three flights of steps and then slides down all three flights with Mr. Popper getting pulled along down the steps behind him. Mr. Popper thinks because penguins do not have wings, they like to get high in the air any way they can, and penguins like to toboggan on their stomachs.

2. He sits in his refrigerator; he will not eat, he sulks, he sleeps, and he bites. Answers will vary as to the reason why, but should mention loneliness or sadness.

3. Mr. Popper writes a letter to Dr. Smith, curator of the Mammoth City Aquarium, who writes back that he also has a penguin who is failing, and since it may be loneliness, he is sending her to Mr. Popper. When the penguins are united, they recover.

4. He has a freezing plant installed in the basement and the furnace is moved up to the living room. Mr. Popper's solution may be more tidy in that the family can now use the living room, but it still causes a lot of disruption and probably is not what Mrs. Popper wanted.

5. The penguins have 10 babies.

Think About the Story:

6. The author uses hyperbole by having Mr. Popper do things that are not sensible, that are even crazy, and that would in reality cause a lot of damage to the house. The author does this to demonstrate just how high Mr. Popper's regard is for the penguins. Mr. Popper's motivation is to make the penguins' comfortable.

7. Answers will vary.

8. He will miss spending time with his penguins.

Dig Deeper:

9. Mr. Popper's priorities are the penguin's comfort and care and spending time with them. Examples may include: He opens all the windows to make it cold for penguins and makes his children wear coats because of the cold. He floods the living room to make ice, causing water damage to their house. He installs a freezing plant in the basement and goes into debt by taking a loan and getting credit since he doesn't have the money for the changes. He moves their furnace up into the living room. He digs a pool for the penguins in the basement floor. He ships in live fish from the coast that