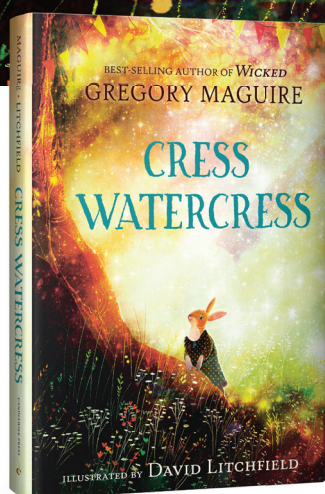


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ABOUT THE BOOK

When Papa doesn't return from a nocturnal honey-gathering expedition, Cress holds out hope, but her mother assumes the worst. It's a dangerous world for rabbits, after all. Mama moves what's left of the Watercress family to the basement of the Broken Arms, a run-down apartment tree with a suspect owl landlord, a nosy mouse super, a rowdy family of squirrels, and a pair of songbirds who broadcast everyone's business. Could a dead tree full of annoying neighbors—and no Papa—ever be *home*?

HC: 978-1-5362-1100-9 • Also available as an e-book

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

ABOUT GREGORY MAGUIRE

Gregory Maguire is the author of the incredibly popular books in the Wicked Years series, including *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*, which inspired the musical. He is also the author of several books for children, including *What-the-Dickens*, a *New York Times* bestseller, and *Egg & Spoon*, a *New York Times Book Review* Notable Children's Book of the Year. Gregory Maguire lives outside Boston.



ABOUT DAVID LITCHFIELD

David Litchfield started to draw when he was very young, creating comics for his older brother and sister. Since then his work has appeared in magazines, newspapers, and books and on T-shirts. His first picture book, *The Bear and the Piano*, won the Waterstones Children's Book Prize. He is also the illustrator of *Rain Before Rainbows* by Smriti Prasadam-Halls and *War Is Over* by David Almond. David Litchfield lives in England.

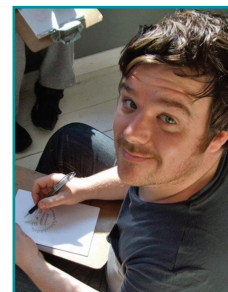


PHOTO BY ANDREW FOSTER



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the book when the three rabbits go outside on the way to their new home, Cress sees the moon (page 4), but she isn't sure if that is what it is. The moon is a frequent theme in the book. How does the author tie the moon to the rabbits' lives?
2. Agatha Cabbage is certainly a character. She is haughty, stuck-up, and rude. Why do you think the author chose a skunk for this role? If you were choosing a forest animal to play the part of a self-proclaimed great lady, what animal would you choose?
3. On page 19 the Watercress family meets Mr. Owl, who tells them, "My hearing is keen. Make a note of it." This is the first time anyone says, "make a note of it," but far from the last. How is this phrase used throughout the book?
4. The Broken Arms does not feel like home for Cress at first. What makes a place feel like home for you?
5. Cress frequently puts herself down because she feels she has no talents. She can't make things like her mother, who weaves; she can't make up stories because she has no imagination; she is too young to babysit her little brother, Kip. What do you think her talents are?
6. Is life fair? Cress's mother doesn't think so. She says, "Tell me what's fair in life" (page 42). What do you think about this?
7. When Finny and Cress are shipwrecked and then lost in the woods, Cress falls into a funk. To quote Finny, she goes "all very-bitter-berry" on him (page 83). To get her out of it, Finny bites her on the tail, and then they chase each other. Biting your friends is not a good way to get them out of a funk; what's an alternative way to cheer them up?
8. Lady Cabbage, the skunk, locks Cress and Finny in her basement where they try to figure out how to escape (page 95). What would you have done in those circumstances?
9. After Cress and Finny return home, there is a celebration. But Cress doesn't understand: "Papa was still gone. Now he felt even more gone. And yet the world was dancing. She was still here. There was music, joking, laughter. What did this mean? How could this be?" (page 112). Have you experienced happiness in the midst of sadness? Or sadness in the midst of happiness? Can you give an example? Why do you think these conflicting emotions arise in such circumstances?
10. On page 118 Fricassee Sunday, the hen, thinks about the difference between living on the farm and living in the wild and declares that she does not want to go back to the farm. "'Why not?'" asked Cress. 'I think,' said Fricassee, 'it's something called freedom? Which is thrilling but worrying? Because it's such a blunder?'" Do you feel the same way as Fricassee? What does freedom mean to you?
11. When Cress and Finny meet Nasty Nasturtium they have very different opinions of her. What did you think of her? Did your opinion change?



12. Cress changes a lot during the course of this book. “Cress felt as if she were becoming someone different. She wondered who. Maybe that is what growing up was all about—not knowing yourself, over and over again” (page 141). How would you describe growing up?
13. Cress discovers that everyone’s life is a story and that there are stories everywhere. She thinks that everyone can make up a story except her. Do you like making up stories? How do you do it?
14. One thing that Cress is good at is making friends, and she knows the important rules: “Friends take care of each other. They don’t run away. They don’t make fun of each other” (page 189). What rules would you add?
15. Did you think Cress’s father would be found? Why or why not?
16. The chapters in this book are very short, some just two pages long. What do you think about this format? Does it move you along quickly, or break up the story too much?
17. There are many very funny lines and incidents in this book. Which ones stand out to you?
18. Besides Cress, who was your favorite character and why?



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These questions were prepared by Grace Worcester, a former youth services consultant for the Vermont Department of Libraries. She has served on the Newbery Medal, Caldecott Medal, *Boston Globe–Horn Book Award*, and National Book Award for Young People’s Literature committees.