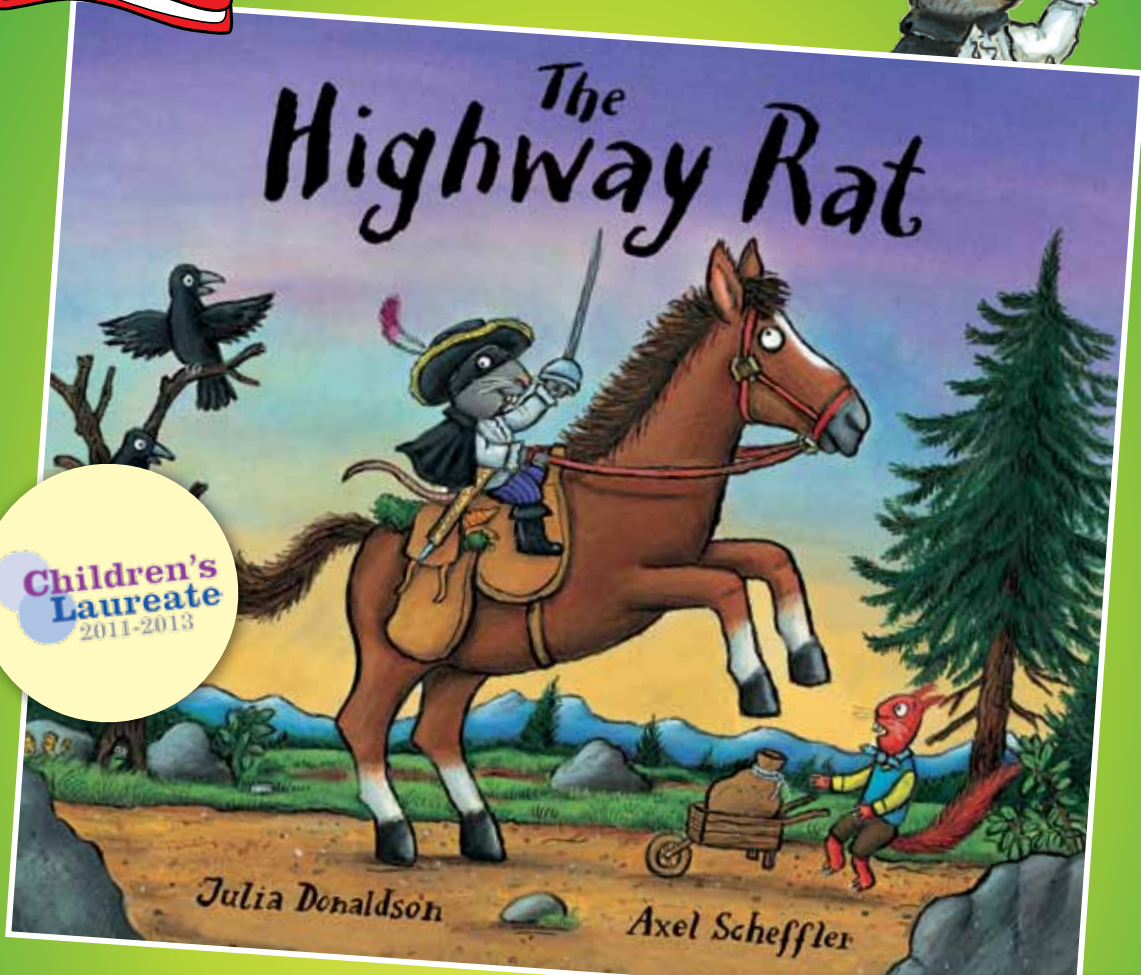


Book Talk



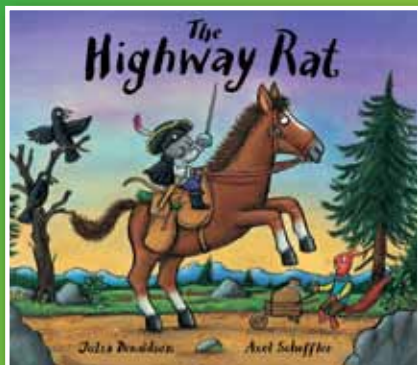
Children's
Laureate
2011-2013

AGES 2+



Engage and inspire your
pupils with a Book Talk!

AGES 2+



Look out for me at
your Book Fair!

Price	£5.99 / €7.00
Case	Welcome to Reading
Author	Julia Donaldson
Illustrator	Axel Scheffler
Publisher	Alison Green Books, an imprint of Scholastic Children's Books

Using this book in your classroom

Themes

This entertaining, rhyming story touches on themes including **bravery**, **bullying**, **the importance of sharing** and the **rights and wrongs of stealing**. It also offers a link with Alfred Noyes' classic poem, *The Highwayman*.

Summary

The Highway Rat is a travelling thief who stops every creature who passes and steals their food. Often, he doesn't even really like their food – most of the animals only have things like nuts and leaves – but he bullies them and takes their food anyway. The other creatures get thinner and thinner, and the Highway Rat gets fatter and fatter – until one day he meets a very brave duck who has the presence of mind to trick him and take his horse, together with the bags of stolen food. The duck shares out the food among all the other creatures, and after an unpleasant adventure in a cave, the Highway Rat learns the error of his ways. He never commits another robbery, and instead he gets a job in a cake shop ... which seems to bring its own rewards!

Did you know?

- Julia Donaldson is the Children's Laureate for 2011-2013. She is the seventh person to hold this prestigious post since the laureateship began in 1999, following on from Quentin Blake, Anne Fine, Michael Morpurgo, Jacqueline Wilson, Michael Rosen and Anthony Browne.
- Julia Donaldson started as a songwriter, and has now written 160 books and 20 plays.



The Story Session

1. Introducing the book

- Do the children know what a highwayman was? If necessary, explain that they were robbers who used to stop travellers on the road and force them to hand over money and valuables.
- Look at the cover picture. What kind of character do the children think the Highway Rat will be? Does he look nice? How does the squirrel on the cover seem to feel about him? Why do the children think this might be?
- Read the first page of the story, and then pause to ask the children how they feel about the Highway Rat now. What do they think will happen to the Highway Rat in the story? Will he get his come-uppance?

2. Reading the story

- Read the rest of the story aloud to the children. Why do they think the Highway Rat steals the other creatures' food even though he doesn't seem to like it? Encourage the children to predict what the other creatures could do to stop the Highway Rat.
- Pause when the Highway Rat gets to the duck's cave. What do the children think is happening when the duck and the Highway Rat shout into the cave? Is the duck's sister really in there? Check that the children pick up that this is an echo and the duck has played a clever trick on the Highway Rat.
- At the end of the story, ask: *Do you think the Highway Rat learned his lesson? Did he get what he deserved? Do you think he likes working in the cake shop?* Look at the last picture for clues about this – it certainly looks as though the rat is enjoying eating some of the crumbs from the floor!

3. Follow-up

- Read excerpts from Alfred Noyes' poem *The Highwayman* to the children. They will be able to enjoy the rhythm and the dramatic language. Can they see how *The Highway Rat* is similar to this poem? Point out that the rhythm is very similar – but the Highwayman is a very different kind of character from the Highway Rat! (You can find the text of Alfred Noyes's poem at www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-highwayman.)
- Talk about how the Highway Rat's horse might have felt about his master's crimes. Do the children think the horse was glad to get away from the Highway Rat at the end of the story? You could ask the children to form pairs, with one child in role as the horse and the other asking questions about how he felt about his old life with the Highway Rat. Alternatively, take on the role of the horse yourself and encourage the children to ask you questions.
- If the children are interested in finding out some more about real highwaymen, there is some useful information on this website: www.bbc.co.uk/insideout/eastmidlands/series3/travellers_highwaymen_derbyshire_peakdistrict.shtml. The text on this site is likely to be too complex for them to read independently, but they may enjoy hearing you read it to them!

YOU TELL US

- Did you use these notes to have a Book Talk in class?
- Were they helpful?
- Are there any changes you'd like to see to make them more useful?

We're always happy to hear your comments, so please email us at bookfairs@scholastic.co.uk (UK) or bookfairs@scholastic.ie (Republic of Ireland).