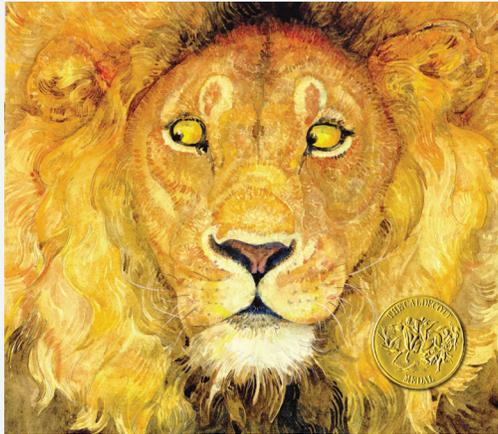


## Second Reaction: A Good Deed Is Never a Waste

Pinkney, Jerry. *The Lion & the Mouse*.  
Little, Brown Books for Young Children, 2009.

*Stephanie R. Logan*



*The Lion & the Mouse*, written and illustrated by Caldecott–winner and recipient of the Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement (2016) Jerry Pinkney, is an artistic retelling of an Aesop fable that highlights how no act of kindness, no matter the size, is ever a waste. Upon a first glance at the book, I welcomed the illustrator’s decision to create a wordless version allowing for the reader to be captivated by the pictures of the savanna and its inhabitants on the African continent. The illustrations highlight the complexity and diversity of the inhabitants—both the animals and the plant-life present specifically in the Tanzanian and Kenyan Serengeti—but also subtly communicate the challenges (i.e., poaching and overgrazing) facing the African Savanna.

The majestic presence of the lion on the front cover sparked the interest of fifteen kindergarten students I shared the book with. None of the young readers were familiar with the tale of the two characters or with fables in general. Their unfamiliarity with the story allowed for the young readers to practice their predicting skills. Before we began our journey through the pages, we discussed what they knew about the two main characters of the story, the setting, and what they thought might occur in the story. As we walked through each page, the young readers were captivated by the scenery in the pictures. On each page they pointed out the animal inhabitants of the Serengeti (i.e., giraffe, elephants, zebra, and monkeys). A couple of students even made a few animal sounds to imitate these characters. When we arrived to the page where the lion and mouse met face-to-face, the young readers were sure that the

lion was going to eat or hurt the mouse. They were relieved and delighted that the lion made the kind choice of letting the mouse go free and return to its family. As the story came to its climax, the students were suspicious of the appearance of two humans and were certain their presence with a rope indicated something sinister. Their concern was confirmed when the lion became entangled in a trap. As the lion appeared to wrestle to free himself and roar, one student predicted that the lion would be saved by the mouse, as his roar from the entrapment was a call to the mouse for help. The students were pleased with the story's resolution, as the mouse came to rescue the lion, who like the mouse was able to return to his family.

The theme of reciprocity or being kind lends to kindness returned is something young readers can begin to comprehend. Since the young readers I shared the text with were not familiar with fables, I believe that with follow-up or part of a unit of study on genres of literature, a teacher could share other fables. In addition to supporting character education instruction, fables as a genre of literature, elements of a story or book (i.e., characters, setting, plot, problem, solution), and the skill of making predictions, this text could also be utilized to remind students of how to take advantage of context clues (i.e., pictures) in order to support their understanding or to clarify information.

In addition to its natural use during the language arts instructional period, Pinkney's version of *The Lion & the Mouse* would also work for social studies and science content instruction. Specifically, the book could be utilized to discuss habitats or biomes. Grassland biomes include savannas—the savanna on the African continent is the largest in the world. The setting for this version of *The Lion & the Mouse* depicts the most notable savanna known as the Serengeti of Tanzania and Kenya. Knowing this, a teacher could do a study of the climate, the animals, and the plants (i.e., the symbolic baobab tree), and even have students compare the savanna on the African continent with other savannas in the world. Additionally, one could discuss with students the number of the savanna animals that are endangered due to poaching or overhunting and how even the savanna vegetation is at risk due to overgrazing and farming.

Given the potential curriculum relevance and the reactions of the young readers, *The Lion & the Mouse* by Jerry Pinkney serves as a great tool for delivering a message of kindness and opening the door to the adventures of the animals, plants, and humans who interact on the Tanzanian and Kenyan Serengeti.

### **About the Author**

**Stephanie R. Logan** is an assistant professor of elementary and multicultural education at the University of Northern Iowa. She is a former elementary teacher and elementary and middle school counselor. Her research interests include preparing culturally competent preservice teachers, creating inclusive classroom and campus environments, and social studies teaching in elementary classrooms.