Scholastic Short Reads Sample

In this Brazilian folk tale, a magical cat takes his master from poverty to wealth and a more carefree life. The story contains some Portuguese words as the people of Brazil mostly speak Portuguese. These include '*olá*' which means means 'hello' and '*gato*' which means 'cat'.

SHORT READS Fiction

Domingo's Cat

One morning, Domingo leant against the trunk of a rosewood tree. 'Ah, Gato,' he mused as he playfully flicked a long piece of grass just out of reach of two swift paws, 'I'm unsure how much longer we can go on like this, for I have nothing left to sell, there's no work to be done in this village, I have no home to live in, and I'm not a talented hunter as you are, my friend. Perhaps you would be better off without me.'

The sleek, ginger cat eased back slowly onto his haunches and regarded the young man he had befriended just six months before. His blue eyes studied Domingo's face; then he spoke in a voice that was soft and rasping. 'Domingo, I had not realised—you are unhappy in our situation?'

'*Caramba*!' cried Domingo, staring at the cat in astonishment. 'You can talk? What kind of sorcery is this?'

'Nothing as dramatic as sorcery,' said the cat, yawning. 'Many animals can speak as humans do; the real question you should ask is why they choose not to.'

Domingo rubbed his eyes, and pinched himself firmly to determine if he was asleep.

The cat continued, 'I must admit, I have never really understood you humans: it makes no sense that an animal would build itself a giant cage to live in, then fill it with useless things.'

He gazed at Domingo and gave an appreciative purr. 'But you have served me well these past months, *meu amigo*, and your kindness and courage will be rewarded. Meet me here tomorrow morning, Domingo, and you shall have your human desires fulfilled. *Tchau* for now!'

The cat travelled deep into the forest, to the secret place where silver and gold lay hidden among ferns and rotting leaves. All afternoon he filled many sacks and dragged them, one by one, to the castle near the edge of the village.

SCHOLASTIC

Based on a Brazilian folk tale

Box 5 • 1000L ☐ Level 30+

Scholastic Short Reads Sample

'Greetings, *Senhor*,' said the cat, bowing politely to the giant who lived there. 'I have come to enquire whether you are interested in selling your castle for a fine profit.'

The giant waved his hands to shoo the cat away. 'Get lost, fleabag, you have nothing I want—you're only good for chasing rats from my *castelo*!'

'I believe you'll be surprised at the things I am good at,' purred the cat, and with a twitch of his whiskers he caused the air around the giant to promptly ripple and steam, forming an air pocket within which the giant morphed and shrank, his nose lengthening, and a thin, pink tail sprouting from his rear end.

By the time the giant was no bigger than a mango seed, he was covered in fur, his ears were round and leathery, and he was completely buried beneath a pile of enormous clothes.

'When you are asked a polite question, it is only good manners to answer politely,' the cat said sternly. 'Now, let's try another question to see if you have learnt anything.'

Unsheathing its claws, the cat slowly dragged away the clothes covering the rat, before leaning in to whisper sweetly, 'Would you like me to deal with your vermin problem, *Senhor "Gigante"*? I am, as you said, very talented in this regard.'

The rat squeaked in fright and fled into the jungle.

The cat returned to the village to collect the new master of the castle, but the morning sun was caressing the tops of the trees by the time he found Domingo, who was sitting under his favourite rosewood tree.

'*Olá*, Domingo!'

'*Olá*, Gato!' Domingo laughed and shook his head. 'I had just decided our conversation was nothing more than a fanciful dream, but here you are!'

The cat smiled condescendingly as he purred, 'Humans generally have difficulty with things they can't explain. Come, it is time to see your new home.'

As they walked, Domingo's cat explained how the castle came to be deserted. He opened wide the great wooden doors and showed the storerooms full of gold and silver, and the fine clothes laid out on the master bed.

'Dress well, Domingo,' said the cat with a flourish, 'for tonight there is a *carnaval* in the streets, where you will dance the *samba* and find a new friend. My gift to you will then be complete.'

'*Obrigado,* Gato,' said Domingo, his eyes shining with happy tears. 'I will forever be grateful for all you have done for me.'

'Yes, it is a fine cage I have provided, and you are now wealthy in a human's eyes. But, *meu amigo*, my time here is at an end, and I have one last request.' He nodded towards the exquisite pink orchids he had placed on the bed. 'Take these flowers to the dance. Choose wisely who you will dance with, for the company you keep is more important than silver or gold.'

The cat walked silently out of the bedroom, into the street, and along the well-worn road.

Perhaps he will come your way some day. '*Quem sabe*?' as they say in Brazil. Who knows?

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Folk Tale

White, Level 30+, 1000L

Origin of Text: Brazil

Summary: A cat befriends a poor young man, and then helps change his fortunes.

Themes: solving problems, manners, wealth, wisdom

Text Features: introduction, italics for non-English words

Literature Focus: metaphor, simile, personification, irony, anthropomorphism

Spelling:

- 'un-' prefix (meaning 'not'): unsure, unhappy, unsheathing
- '-ful' suffix (meaning 'full of'): fanciful

Vocabulary/Grammar/Punctuation:

- Portuguese words: caramba (exclamation of surprise), meu amigo (my friend), tchau (goodbye), senhor (sir, mr), obrigado (thank you)
- compound words: afternoon, bedroom, fleabag, rosewood, storerooms, well-worn
- subordinating conjunctions: for, because
- fronted adverbial phrases: As they walked,…; Unsheathing its claws,…

Domingo's Cat

Focus Question: What is more important to have than money?

PREPARE & READ

- *Read the title and introduction. Ask students why some Portuguese words might be used in the story.* (make story convincing; give a Brazilian atmosphere)
- *Ask students what extra information the map on page 2 provides.* (shows Brazil is in South America) *Ask what else they know about Brazil.* (Rio de Janeiro is capital; huge Amazon rainforest; Mardi Gras festival before Easter)
- *Ask students to read the card.*

READ CLOSELY

Problem

Why is Domingo unhappy at the start of the story? *(not successful in human terms—nothing to sell; no work; no home; can't hunt)* Why does the cat decide to help him? *(Domingo good to him; wants to make Domingo happy)* 4–9

Cause and Effect

What does the cat do first to try to get the castle for Domingo? What does the giant say? What does the cat do then? 10–16

> *. . . The cat works hard gathering silver and gold from the forest and offers these to the giant in exchange for the castle. The owner, a giant, refuses the cat's offer, and also insults him. The cat then uses magic to turn the giant into a rat and scares it away.*

Words and Phrases in Context

What is different about the words in italics? *(Portuguese)* Without looking them up, what helps you understand what they mean? *(context: replace English words, eg.'Tchau' in place of 'Goodbye'; similar to English: 'castelo' for 'castle', 'carnaval' for 'carnival'; familiar expressions: 'amigo' for 'friend')* 9 12 21

Make Connections

What does the cat say about humans at the start of the story? What does he think are the most important gifts he gives Domingo? 8 23

> *. . . At the start, the cat says he doesn't understand why humans live in cages full of useless things. But he makes Domingo wealthy anyway. He thinks his most important gifts are the flowers and his advice to use them to choose a good companion, for he believes good company is the most precious thing of all.*

Characters

What does the cat think of humans? *(thinks them irrational, but is caring towards them)* How can you tell this? *(says Domingo has served him well and deserves to be rewarded, but also tries to guide Domingo and show him the right path as he believes humans are irrational beings)* 8–9 21–23

Author's Purpose

What do you think the author's main purpose is in telling this story? *(say what is important in life—people we are close to, not what we own)*

Scholastic Short Reads Sample

In this Brazilian folk tale, a magical cat takes his master from poverty to wealth and a more carefree life. The story contains some Portuguese words as the people of Brazil mostly speak Portuguese. These include *'olá'* which means means 'hello' and *'gato'* which means 'cat'.

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Based on a Brazilian folk tale

SCHOLASTIC

Box 5 • 1000L ☐ Level 30+

DISCUSS

These questions can be used for paired discussion. Ask students to use the text to support their reasoning. Then, ask them to share their conclusions with the group.

- How is the first illustration unusual? *(cat has town painted in its fur; seems to be part of the land)* Why might the cat be shown in this way? *(suggests bigger than lives of humans; joined to forest)*
- Why do you think a cat is chosen to deliver the message of this story? *(cats close to people, but known for being independent; give outsider's view of us)* What is special about this cat? *(chooses to speak; magical abilities; crosses between forest and village)*
- What do you think the cat valued most of the things it got from the forest? *(not gold and silver to store in house, but orchids for Domingo to take to dance)* What does the last line of the story show? *(suggests lesson is relevant to reader too; that the cat's advice applies to all people)*

WRITE

Have students choose either one of the following options for writing, or do both.

- Domingo's cat talks to him. If your pet could talk, what might it say? Write a dialogue between you and your pet, or any animal. *(hint: write as a dialogue in a story, or as in a play, with just character names and spoken words)* **(Information/Explanation)**
- The cat asks why animals might choose not to speak to humans. Based on the story, write an answer. **(Opinion)**

Historical Note: Portugal took over the land that became Brazil in 1500 and ruled for the next 300 years. Much wealth came from farming and mining for gold, silver and diamonds. Sixty per cent of the Amazon rainforest lies in Brazil. It is the world's most biodiverse forest, but it continues to be cleared for timber, mining and farming.

Scholastic Short Reads Sample

Scholastic Short Reads Sample

SHORT READS
Non-fiction

INVASIVE SPECIES

As people have spread out across the planet, so have their pets and herd animals. Sometimes the newcomers settle into their new home without any problems. But some animals adapt so well to their new environment that they run rampant.

These are called invasive species. They are the goats, horses, pigs and rabbits that roam across many lands, escapees from long-ago farms. They are the hundreds of thousands of camels that roam the Australian outback, depleting its already-scant vegetation. They are the American crayfish that were brought to British waters as a food source only to outcompete the local varieties and infect them with a fungal plague. We'll look at a few other culprits.

The **eastern grey squirrel** isn't normally regarded as a pest in its homeland of eastern North America. During the 20th century it began to spread throughout the UK and other parts of Europe. It has been highly successful. It is no longer preyed upon by its old enemies, and is larger and more resilient than the red squirrel that is native to Europe. It carries a virus that is fatal to red squirrels, and it competes with them for food and territory. Between invading squirrels and humans encroaching on their habitat, the red squirrels' population in the UK has plummeted, although many areas have conservation strategies.

The **common brushtail possum** is widespread in its native Australia. However native and feral carnivores have kept the possum population in check.

Not so in New Zealand, where its only enemies are cats and humans. Since its introduction in the 1850s, the possum has spread like wildfire. Many possums carry a form of tuberculosis that infects and kills cattle and deer, posing a huge problem for farmers. Possums eat the eggs of native birds and compete with them for food. Traps and poisons have reduced possum numbers in recent decades. But the population is still 30 million. That's far too many for a small island group with a unique flora and fauna.

Scholastic Short Reads Sample

As if in retribution for sharing its possums with New Zealand, Australia became home to the **cane toad** in 1935. The toads were deliberately brought in from Hawaii to control native beetles that were destroying sugar cane crops in coastal north Queensland. They settled happily in their new land. Cane toads produce a poison that kills or sickens most animals that try to eat them. The effect has been devastating on native animals like the northern quoll as well as snakes and other reptiles. The toads have spread halfway down the east coast. They have migrated across the top of the continent into Western Australia. There is no effective way to get rid of them.

The **brown rat** is one of the most common rats in the world. It probably originated in Asia, travelling to Europe and North America in the 18th century. Nothing could stop it in that age of exploration. As the red shading shows in the map, it is found almost everywhere. Only Antarctica, parts of the Arctic and some isolated islands and conservation areas are brown rat-free. These rodents will eat almost anything. They thrive in a range of habitats, from the streets and sewers of a crowded city to the peace of the farmyard or forest.

Macquarie Island—a Success Story

Halfway between New Zealand and Antarctica is Macquarie Island. This world heritage area is the seasonal home of penguins, seals and millions of seabirds including albatrosses. The seal-hunting ships that started to arrive in the early 1800s left a legacy of **rats and mice**. The hunters brought **cats** to control the rodents, but the cats mostly preyed on the native birds. The ships then brought **rabbits** to the island. The fast-breeding rabbits demolished the landscape.

The cats were culled between 1985 and 2000, giving the rabbits and rodents free reign. Then a joint eradication program began in 2010. Baits were dropped from planes and rabbits were infected with calicivirus to lower their numbers. Specially trained dogs were taken to the island to clean up the last of the invaders. In 2014 Macquarie Island was declared to be pest-free.

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Encyclopedia

White, Level 30+, 970L

Text Type: Report

Summary: This card details examples of invasive animal species, and how they have been successfully eliminated on Macquarie Island.

Themes/Ideas: recognising problems related to introduced animals; understanding how and why introduced animals sometimes thrive, and how they can be controlled

Text Features: map, subheadings, photos, bold text, coloured text

Vocabulary:

- ***conservation:*** the act of protecting or preserving something
- ***encroach:*** to intrude on someone's space or rights
- ***fungal:*** caused by fungus (organisms that reproduce by spores)
- ***invasive:*** spreads quickly, undesirably, harmfully
- ***plummet:*** to fall or drop rapidly
- ***retribution:*** punishment, usually well-deserved
- ***World Heritage Area:*** areas of physical/cultural importance as judged by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation)

Invasive Species

Focus Question: What are invasive animal species, and what effect do they have on the environment?

PREPARE & READ

- *Review the meaning of* invasive species.
- *Ask students to read the card.*

READ CLOSELY

Key Ideas and Details/Author's Language Choices

Re-read the first paragraph. What key ability in some pets or herd animals causes them to become "invasive species" in a new environment? Which words and phrases in the introduction indicate that invasive species are not welcome or positive additions to other countries? 1

Compare and Contrast

The eastern grey squirrel and the common brushtail possum caused similar problems in the countries in which they were introduced. What were these problems? 2 3

> *. . . The eastern grey squirrel and the common brushtail both clashed with native animals in the lands they invaded, competing with them for food and territory. Both animals carried diseases that killed other animals around them. Neither animal has predators that can keep it under control.*

Key Ideas and Details

The cane toad was deliberately introduced into Australia. What was the reason? What problems have they caused? 4

Illustrations and Text

Why did the author include a map with the section discussing the brown rat? Why do you think that Antarctica and parts of the Arctic are the only areas that are rat-free? 5

Summarise

What possible problems could be encountered when an animal species invades a country? Refer to the text to support your answer. 1–6

Draw Conclusions

Why do you think the author finished with the story of Macquarie Island? Why might it be easier to get rid of invasive animals on Macquarie Island rather than in European or Asian countries? 6

> *. . . The author probably finished the discussion with Macquarie Island because it was a positive story—it shows that controlling invasive species is difficult but not impossible. Controlling pests on an island would be much easier than on a large continent such as Europe or Asia, where animals can walk, fly or swim to other places with relative ease.*

Scholastic Short Reads Sample

INVASIVE SPECIES

1

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DISCUSS

These questions can be used for paired discussion. Ask students to use the text to support their reasoning. Then ask them to share their conclusions with the group.

- Which invasive species from the card would survive best as climate change becomes more of a problem for the world? Support your reasoning with information from the text.
- New Zealand has developed a successful industry creating possum fur products to sell. Why is this strategy a clever way to help control possum numbers in New Zealand?
- The text states that "there is no effective way to get rid of" cane toads. What does this statement imply? Do you think scientists in Australian might have already tried many methods?

WRITE

Have students choose either one of the following options for writing, or do both.

- Create a flowchart for Macquarie Island detailing how its animal population has changed over time, and the various ways that humans have intervened to repair the damage they caused. **(Information/Explanation)**
- Why is it important to control the spread of different animal species across countries and continents? Write a paragraph expressing your point of view. Use facts from the text to support your answer. **(Opinion)**

Scholastic Short Reads Sample