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Bunnicula was written by husband-and-wife team Deborah and James Howe. Deborah Howe was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on August 12, 1946. She attended Boston University and received her B.F.A. in 1968. Before writing Bunnicula with her husband, she worked for nearly a decade as an actress in New York.

James Howe was born August 2, 1946, in Oneida, New York. Like Deborah, he also received his B.F.A. from Boston University in 1968 and an M.A. from Hunter College in 1977. One day, he hit on the idea of a “vampire bunny,” but it was Mrs. Howe who decided that Bunnicula: A Rabbit Tale of Mystery should become a children’s book and that they should work together. Mr. Howe describes the process:

> We sat around our kitchen table one night throwing ideas out to each other. It was in this session we decided Bunnicula’s victims would be vegetables, not people. It was truly a collaborative process. One of us would talk out loud while the other wrote frantically. As we inspired each other’s thinking, the ideas and words overlapped, until there were sentences, phrases, even, that were truly the creation of two people.

Sadly, Mrs. Howe battled cancer and died in 1978. The team’s second book, Teddy Bear’s Scrapbook, was published in 1980, after her death. Mr. Howe later married Betsy Imershein, a theater producer. He continues to write children’s books, finding the activity to have “a kind of creative control that is deeply fulfilling,” though he does not believe he was born to write:

> Writing, at least professionally, is a recent development. But the creative itch has been with me for as long as I can remember. And it has always been strong enough that it demanded to be scratched.
Bunnicula: A Rabbit-Tale of Mystery

by Deborah and James Howe

(Avon Camelot Books, 1979)

(Available in Canada, UK, and Australia from International Book Dist. Contact Al Polan 201-967-5810)

The Monroe family’s intellectual pet cat, Chester, turns detective when the family brings home a rabbit abandoned in a nearby theater seat, found when they go to a showing of Dracula. While Harold, the family dog, is disappointed in Bunnicula’s inability to play, Chester notices very different things. For example, Chester decides the rabbit’s teeth look very much like fangs and its fur looks very much like Dracula’s cape.

Certain that the Monroes have a vampire bunny on their hands, Chester unsuccessfully tries to convince Harold that they need to get rid of Bunnicula. When vegetables from the refrigerator show up white (and, with closer examination, fang holes are found by Chester) and Bunnicula keeps waking at midnight to go into the kitchen, Chester does his best vampire imitation to show the Monroes what a mistake they have made. When the Monroes fail to understand Chester’s message, Chester decides it is up to him to protect the family from Bunnicula, even resorting to garlic to ward off the rabbit. Soon, Bunnicula is so frightened of Chester that he will not leave his cage, becoming weak and hungry.

Fortunately, Harold tries to save the day by getting Bunnicula to a bowl of salad on the family dining table. Although Harold’s plan is foiled, the Monroes finally get the idea that Bunnicula is both starving and scared. All three pets are taken to the vet, where Bunnicula is prescribed a liquid diet, Harold finds out he does not need shots after all, and Chester, diagnosed with a case of sibling rivalry, is sent to meet a pet psychiatrist.
Vocabulary Lists

On this page are vocabulary lists which correspond to each sectional grouping of chapters. Vocabulary activity ideas can be found on page 9. Vocabulary knowledge may be evaluated by including selected words in the quizzes and tests. This can be done with multiple choice, matching, or fill-in-the-blank questions.

Section 1
(Chapters 1–2)

admiration  vivid
reverie  eerie
tranquil  gypsy
decipher  hideous
compromise  fangs

Section 2
(Chapters 3–4)

analysis  sauntered
indulgent  scornfully
romp  dialect
pendulum  vampire
subtle  zucchini

Section 3
(Chapters 5–6)

panic  emanated
seized  pendant
throttle  immobile
blight  stake
organic  pathetic

Section 4
(Chapters 7–9)

exemplary  nourishment
distressed  reluctance
listless  overwrought
disaster  psychiatrist
petrified  narrative
You can help your students learn and retain the vocabulary in *Bunnicula* by providing them with interesting vocabulary activities. Here are a few ideas to try.

- As a group activity, have students work together to create an **illustrated dictionary** of the vocabulary words.

- **Play vocabulary concentration.** The goal of this game is to match vocabulary words with their definitions. Divide the class into groups of two to five students. Have the students make two sets of cards the same size and color. On one set have them write the vocabulary words, on the second set have them write the definitions. All cards are mixed together and placed face down on the table. A player picks two cards. If the pair matches the word with its definition, the player keeps the cards and takes another turn. If the cards do not match, they are returned to their places face down on the table, and another player takes a turn. Players must concentrate to remember the locations of the words and their definitions. The game continues until all matches have been made. This is an ideal activity for free exploration time.

- **Play vocabulary charades.** In this game, vocabulary words are acted out.

- **Play vocabulary mum ball.** One student says a vocabulary word before throwing a ball made of soft material to another student. The catcher must define the word to stay in the game. If the catcher cannot define the word or drops the ball, he or she is out of the game.

- **Keep a word wall in your room.** When students find a new vocabulary word in their reading, have them write the new word, its definition, and a sentence using the word on an index card and staple it to a bulletin board set aside for this purpose.

- **Play bingo with vocabulary words.** Hand out worksheets with an empty grid on which students will write a different vocabulary word in each square. As you or a student volunteer calls out a vocabulary word, students cover it with a marker if it appears on their grid. Continue playing until a student has filled the grid with markers straight across, down, or diagonally. The student who has bingo must then define each word along the line before being declared the winner.

- Challenge students to find **synonyms** or **antonyms** for the vocabulary words from within the story.

You probably have more ideas to add to this list. Try them. See if experiencing vocabulary on a personal level increases your students’ vocabulary interest and retention.