

# ANTON AND CECIL: CATS AT SEA

LISA MARTIN AND VALERIE MARTIN

This guide includes questions and activities aligned with the Common Core State Standards, grades 3-7

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Cecil and Anton are cat brothers, as different as port and starboard. Stocky Cecil loves being on the sea. Slim Anton is a confirmed landlubber. When Anton is forced into service as a ratter on a ship bound for ports unknown, Cecil quickly sets sail in pursuit. The Atlantic is a vast ocean. The brothers fear they'll never be reunited. Yet they also keep hearing an old cat's saying: "Where the eye meets the eye, the lost shall be found."

In the tradition of such classic stories as *The Wind in the Willows*, *Stuart Little*, and *Poppy*, this animal fantasy boasts a colorful cast, lyrical storytelling, and a page-turning plot full of twists and heart-tugging turns.



Photo Credit: John Cullen

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

**VALERIE MARTIN** is widely acclaimed for her adult novels, among them *Property*, winner of the Orange Prize, *The Confessions of Edward Day*, and *Mary Reilly*, which was made into a movie starring Julia Roberts. She lives in New York.



Photo Credit: John Cullen

**LISA MARTIN**, Valerie's niece, is an educator and children's poet who lives in Virginia. This is Valerie and Lisa's first collaboration and their first book for young readers.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST:

**KELLY MURPHY** has illustrated many books, including *Masterpiece* by Elise Broach, winner of the E. B. White Read Aloud Award. A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, where she is now on the faculty, Ms. Murphy lives in Massachusetts.

## CONNECTING TO THE COMMON CORE

These discussion questions will help students in grades three to seven meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. Among these are the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and for integration of knowledge and ideas (ELA-Literacy.RL), and the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration, and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (ELA-Literacy.SL).



**COMMON CORE  
State Standards**

*Connection to*  
**ANCHOR STANDARD**

RL.3.3    RL.4.3

RL.5.3    RL.6.3

RL.7.3

R.3

RL.5.9    RL.6.2

RL.7.2

R.3

RL.3.1    RL.4.1

RL.5.1    RL.6.1

RL.7.1

R.4

RL.3.4    RL.4.4

RL.5.4    RL.6.4

RL.7.4

R.4

RL.5.5    RL.6.5

RL.7.3

R.6

RL.4.3    RL.5.3

RL.6.3    RL.7.3

R.3

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. In what ways is Cecil different from Anton? How are the brothers also quite similar?

*Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.*

2. The heart of this novel is Cecil's quest to find Anton, but his rescue mission is not the only quest in this story. What is Anton searching for? What does Hieronymus seek? What are Gretchen, the pirates, and even the whale pursuing?

*Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.*

3. "Where the eye sees the eye, the lost shall be found," Old Billy says to Anton, who initially has no idea what the saying means (p. 24). What does Anton learn over time? Whose eyes are meeting? How is it that the lost are found?

*Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.*

4. Anton provokes Cecil by calling him a pet (p. 33). Why is that an insult?

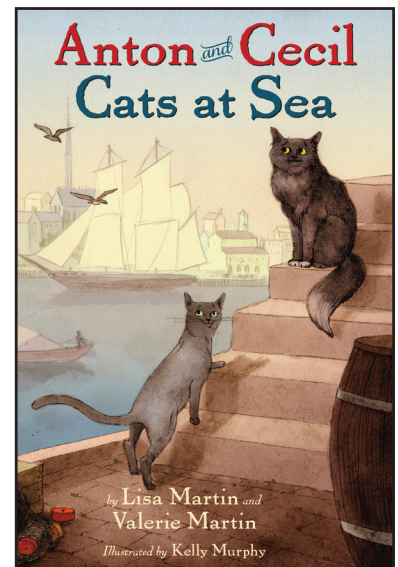
*Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.*

5. Like many favorite yarns, this seafaring tale is full of coincidences, unlikely events that bring the characters together. One example is when Cecil winds up on a ship with Gretchen, who is also from Lunenburg. What are some of the other major coincidences in the story? How do they push the plot along? How do they make the story more fun?

*Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.*

6. How do animal families differ from human ones? What has Hieronymus experienced that few humans have? Why can't Sonya join the search for her sons?

*Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.*



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**COMMON CORE  
State Standards**

**Connection to  
ANCHOR STANDARD**

RL.6.6

RL.7.6

R.6

7. The coauthors of this novel are related to each other. Valerie Martin is the aunt of Lisa Martin. What other favorite books of yours were written by coauthors? What do you think are the challenges of working with a coauthor? Would being related to your coauthor make collaboration easier or more difficult? What do you think?

*Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.*

RL.3.3

RL.4.3

RL.5.3

RL.6.3

RL.7.3

R.3

8. In Chapter 13, Anton and Hieronymus need the water inside a wooden barrel to survive. Hieronymus works all day gnawing a hole in wood. His jaw hurts. His mouth, nose, and chin are bloody from chewing. But he never gives up. Why?

*Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.*

RL.4.1

RL.5.1

RL.6.1

RL.7.1

R.1

9. Cats and mice are traditional enemies, but when Anton and Hieronymus are on the verge of starvation and Hieronymus offers himself up as a meal, Anton refuses: "I don't eat my friends" (p. 211). How do humans make friends of their enemies? What do they need to know about each other?

*Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.*

RL.3.7

RL.4.7

RL.5.7

R.7

10. Take a closer look at the illustrations. What do they add to this novel? How do they establish its setting? How do they enhance your understanding of the characters?

*Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.*

RL.3.3

RL.4.3

RL.5.3

R.3

11. How do the cats and humans depend upon each other in this novel? What do Cecil and Anton take from humans? What do humans want from them? What aspects of pirate life does Gretchen enjoy? What concerns her?

*Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.*

RL.4.1

RL.5.1

RL.6.1

RL.7.1

R.1

12. The novel ends with all the characters back on dry land in Lunenburg. Do you think they'll stay there? What do you imagine the future holds for Anton, Cecil, Gretchen, and Hieronymus?

*Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*

**Common Core State Standards (Speaking and Listening)** also addressed by all questions: SL.3.1a-d, SL.4.1a-d, SL.5.1a-d, SL.6.1a-d, SL.7a-d, SL.5.6; SL.6.6, SL.7.6.

Connection to **Anchor Speaking and Listening Standard SL.1** "Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively."

Connection to **Anchor Speaking and Listening Standard SL.6** "Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate."



**COMMON CORE**  
State Standards

Connection to  
**ANCHOR STANDARD**

**ACTIVITIES:**

RH.6-8.7

R.7

**Atlantic Maps**

Cecil and Anton are never sure where they are sailing, but that doesn't mean your students can't try to chart their course. Examine the fanciful map opposite chapter 1 and use a printed or online map to try to follow Cecil's and Anton's voyages. Start at Lunenburg in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia and then head off to sea. Which modern-day Caribbean country was the one where Gretchen and Anton were caged at the market?

*Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.*

**Mouse Tales**

Hieronymus is full of astonishing family stories. Ask your students to tell a mouse tale of their own. Divide them into small groups and have each group choose a name for their main character and a brief life story for their remarkable rodent. Where was he or she born? When? What were his or her greatest achievements? What were his or her failures? Why is the mouse still remembered? A spokesperson from each group can tell their mouse's life history to the whole class.

W.4.3

W.5.3

W.6.3

W.7.3

W.3

*Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.*

**Sea Shanties**

Anton hears his favorite sea shanty, "The Fish of the Sea," at a Lunenburg saloon and then again on board a ship. Your students can hear the shanty as well if you have online access in your classroom. Although many sea shanties are too salty for school, the following tunes are age appropriate and can easily be found via a standard internet search: "Where Am I to Go Me Johnnies," "Sacramento," "Jamestown Homeward Bound," and "Heave Away Me Johnny."

SL.4.5

SL.5.5

SL.6.5

SL.7.5

SL.2

*Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.*



**COMMON CORE**  
State Standards

Connection to  
**ANCHOR STANDARD**

SL.4.1

SL.5.1

SL.6.1

SL.7.1

SL.3

**Old Sea Hands**

Even if your school is a thousand miles from the nearest ocean, chances are excellent that someone in your community has worked on the sea. Cast a wide net, including to local veterans groups, and try to invite a one-time sailor to speak to your class. If possible, encourage your visitor to read the novel beforehand. Be sure your students are well prepared. Brainstorm as a whole class before the visit and formulate ten to fifteen questions about life at sea, then and now.

*Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.*

**Modern Pirates**

Jewels and gold are the bounty that Gretchen's pirates seek, but what about today's buccaneers? What are they stealing? Ask your students to scour online sources, newspapers, and magazines for news of modern piracy. Post clippings or printouts about true-life pirates on a classroom bulletin board.

RI.5.7

RI.6.7

R.7

*Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.*

**Who's Who**

To a cat, all humans look pretty much alike. Ask your students to imagine that Cecil and Anton are coming to visit your classroom. Have each student write an introductory email that describes what makes him or her distinctive from a feline's point of view.

W.4.2

W.5.2

W.6.2

W.7.2

W.4

*Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.*

