

Pre-Assessment— *Poppy* by Avi Chapter 1

1 A THIN CRESCENT MOON, high in the sky, shed faint white light over Dimwood
2 Forest. Stars glowed. Breezes full of ripe summer fragrance floated over nearby meadow
3 and hill. Dimwood itself veiled in darkness, lay utterly still.

4 At the very edge of this forest stood an old charred oak on which sat a great horned owl.
5 The owl's name was Mr. Ocax, and he looked like death himself

6 Mr. Ocax's eyes—flat upon his face—were round and yellow with large ebony pupils that
7 enabled him to see as few other creatures could. Moonlight—even faint moon-light—was
8 as good as daylight for him.

9 With his piercing gaze, Mr. Ocax surveyed the lands he called his own, watching for the
10 comings and goings of the creatures he considered his subjects—and his dinners. He
11 looked at Glitter Creek, home to the fish he found so appetizing; the Tar Road, across
12 which tasty rabbits were known to hop; Jayswood, where meaty chipmunks sometimes
13 skittered before dawn. By swiveling his head he searched the Marsh for a savory frog, then
14 New Field, where, usually, he could count on a delicious vole or two. He looked at Gray
15 House, where Farmer Lamout used to live, then upon the Old Orchard. He even looked,
16 nervously, toward New House. But nowhere did he see a thing to eat. Profoundly annoyed,
17 Mr. Ocax was beginning to think he would have no dinner that night.

18 But finally, there—near the top of Bannock Hill, where the ponderosa pines had all been
19 cut, where only a few struggling saplings and bushes grew—he saw movement. Just the
20 glimmer of food was enough to cause his owl's heart to pound, his curved black beak to
21 clack, his feathered horns to stand up tall.

22 Mr. Ocax shifted his head from right to left, forward and back. When he did so, he beheld
23 ... two mice! Of all the creatures the owl hunted, he enjoyed mice the most. They were the
24 best eating, to be sure, but better still, they were the most fearful, and Mr. Ocax found deep
25 satisfaction in having others afraid of him. And here, after a wait of nearly the whole night,
26 were two savory subjects to terrify before he ate them.

27 One of the two, a deer mouse, crouched cautiously beneath a length of rotten bark. The
28 other, a golden mouse, stood in the open on his hind legs, his short tail sticking straight out
29 behind for balance. From his left ear an earring dangled. In his paws he held a hazelnut.

30 "It's not as if I haven't warned these mice," Mr. Ocax murmured to himself "If they will
31 move about without my permission, they have only themselves to blame for the
32 consequences." As he leaned forward to listen, his sharp-as-needles talons, four to each
33 large claw and jet-black at their tips, cut deeply into the branch he was perched on.
34 "Catching these two mice," he mused, "is going to be fun."

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35 On Bannock Hill, the golden mouse turned to his timid companion and said, "Poppy,
36 girl, this hazelnut is bad-to-the-bone. Bet you seed to sap there's more where it came
37 from. Come on out and dig."

38 "Ragweed," Poppy replied as she sniffed tensely in all directions, "you promised we'd
39 dance when we got here. We can't do it in the open. Besides, I want to answer your question.
41 So will you *please* get under here with me."

42 Ragweed laughed. "Dude, you must think I'm as dull as a dormouse. You just want to get some of
43 this nut."

44 "I don't want any of your precious nut," Poppy insisted. "I want to give you my answer. And I
45 want to dance! Isn't that the reason we came up the hill? Only it's not safe out there."

46 "Oh, tell me about it."

47 "You heard my father's warnings," Poppy went on. "It's Mr. Ocax. He might be watching and
48 listening."

49 "Get off," Ragweed sneered. "Your pop talks about that Ocax dude just to scare you and keep you
50 under control."

51 "Ragweed," Poppy cried, "that's ridiculous. Mr. Ocax *does* rule Dimwood. So we *have* to ask his
52 permission to be here. And you know perfectly well we never did."

53 "Dude, I'm not going to spend my life asking an old owl's okay every time I want to have fun.
54 Know what I'm saying? This is our moment, girl, right? And now that I've dug this nut up, I'm
55 going to enjoy it. Besides," he said, "it's too dark for an old owl to see me."

56 "*Poppy*," Mr. Ocax scoffed under his breath. "*Ragweed*. What stupid names mice have. Now, if only
57 that deer mouse will move just a little farther out from under cover, I'll be able to snare both mice
58 at once."

59 The mere thought of such a double catch made Mr. Ocax hiss with pleasure. Then he clacked his
60 beak, spread his wings, and rose into the night air. Up he circled, his fluted flight feathers beating
61 the air silently.

62 High above Bannock Hill, he looked down. The golden mouse—the one eating the nut—was still
63 in the open. So brazen. So foolish. Nevertheless, Mr. Ocax decided to hold back another moment
64 to see if the deer mouse might budge.

65 "*Ragweed*," Poppy pleaded, "please get under here."

66 "Girl," Ragweed said, "do you know what your problem is? You let your tail lead the way"

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67 Poppy hurt and wanting to show she was *not* a coward, poked her nose and whiskers out from
68 under the bark. "Ragweed," she persisted even as she began to creep into the open, "being
69 careless is stupid."

70 Her friend took another scrape of the nut and sighed with pleasure. "Poppy;" he said, "you may be
71 my best girl, but admit it, you don't know how to live like I do."

72 Poppy took two more steps beyond the bark.

73 Just then, Mr. Ocax pulled his wings close to his body and plunged. In an instant he was right
74 above and behind the two mice. Once there, he threw out his wings—to brake his speed; pulled
75 back his head—to protect his eyes; and thrust his claws forward and wide like grappling
76 hooks-to pounce.

77 It was Poppy who saw him. "Ragweed!" she shrieked in terror as she hurled herself back
78 undercover. "It's Ocax!"

79 But the owl was already upon them. Down came his right claw. It scratched the tip of Poppy's
80 nose. Down came his left claw. It was more successful, clamping around Ragweed's head and
81 neck like a vise of needles, killing him instantly. The next moment the owl soared back into the
82 air. A lifeless Ragweed—earring glittering in the moonlight—hung from a claw. As for the
83 hazelnut, it fell to the earth like a cold stone.

84 Powerful but leisurely strokes brought Mr. Ocax back to his watching tree. Once there, he shifted
85 the dead Ragweed from talon to beak in one gulp. The mouse disappeared down his throat,
86 earring and all.

87 His hunger momentarily satisfied, Mr. Ocax tilted back his head and let forth a long, low cry of
88 triumph. "Whooo-whooo!"

89 Poppy did not hear the call. In her terror she had fainted. Now she lay unconscious beneath the
90 length of rotten bark.

91 The owl did not mind. He had enjoyed the first mouse so much he decided to wait for the second.
92 Indeed, Mr. Ocax was not entirely sorry that Poppy had escaped. She was terrified, and he
93 enjoyed that. And for sure, he would get her soon. "Oh yes," he murmured to himself "mice *are* the
94 most fun to catch." Then Mr. Ocax did that rare thing for an owl: He smiled.

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DIRECTIONS: After reading the selection, answer the following questions by writing the letter of the **BEST** answer in the blank before each question. You may look back at the selection, as you answer the questions.

- _____ 1. The main idea of this excerpt is that Mr. Ocax
- likes to eat fish.
 - rules Dimwood forest.
 - wants to wear earrings.
 - has sharp talons.
- _____ 2. According to this excerpt, Mr. Ocax
- can see very well.
 - is never hungry.
 - is blind at night.
 - eats only frogs.
- _____ 3. According to Poppy, Ragweed and Poppy have come to Bannock Hill to
- eat nuts.
 - see Mr. Ocax.
 - dance in the moonlight.
 - admire his earring.
- _____ 4. Because they get frightened, Ocax's favorite animal to hunt is
- rabbits.
 - voles
 - chipmunks.
 - mice.
- _____ 5. In this excerpt, Mr. Ocax is described as looking
- like death.
 - terrified.
 - hungry.
 - like an eagle.
- _____ 6. The word *clamping* in the ^{80th} ~~90th~~ line means
- turning.
 - closing.
 - dangling.
 - tilting.

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- _____ 7. The word *does* in line 51 is italicized
- a. to show emphasis.
 - b. for spelling.
 - c. for pronunciation.
 - d. all of the above.
- _____ 8. Poppy and Ragweed could be in trouble because they have not asked permission from
- a. Poppy's father.
 - b. Farmer Lamout.
 - c. Mrs. Dimwood.
 - d. Mr. Ocax.
- _____ 9. In lines 11-14, chipmunks are described as
- a. delicious.
 - b. tasty.
 - c. meaty.
 - d. appetizing.
- _____ 10. The organization of this selection is
- a. description.
 - b. sequence.
 - c. comparison/contrast.
 - d. definition.

Appendix 1a5