



POWELL CENTER FOR  
ECONOMIC LITERACY

*Lesson Plan*

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## Economics in *The Tale of Despereaux*: Choices & Consequences

### Time Required

Varies with time spent on the book.

### Grade Level and Subject

Grades 3 – 5: Language arts, reading

### Keystone Principles

[Principle #3 – All choices have consequences.](#)

### Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics

[Standard #2](#) – Marginal cost/benefit: Effective decision making requires comparing the additional costs of alternatives with the additional benefits. Most choices involve doing a little more or a little less of something: few choices are "all or nothing" decisions.

## Economic Concepts

**Opportunity cost** – *When we make a choice, we must give something up. This holds for all decisions. By choosing to take one action, we give up other opportunities.*

**Benefit** – *The positive gain received from an action or decision.*

**Cost** - *The resources used (time, money, talents, etc.) when we choose to do something.*

**Cost/Benefit Analysis** – *A comparison of the costs and benefits of making a choice or decision. It is presumed that individuals make certain choices because, in their analysis, the benefits outweigh the costs. Sometimes this is not true because of incomplete information or a misunderstanding of the costs and/or benefits.*

## Overview

This lesson will have students create a linear flow chart for choices and decisions made by characters in *The Tale of Despereaux*. Students will see how the choices and decisions that were made had the consequence of bringing all the characters together and contributed to the ending of the story.

## Objectives

- Using different colored yarns, students will create a linear flow chart that illustrates the major choices or decisions made by major characters in *The Tale of Despereaux*.
- Students will indicate the decisions of each character with a fork in the timeline, continuing the character's story with by following one of the forks.
- As character's flows converge, students will combine yarns to indicate the consequence of different choices. Further choices will move certain characters forward together.

## Materials and Handouts

- The book, *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo.
- Different colored balls of yarn – one ball for each character. You may want to consider a minimum of four balls for the characters Despereaux, the Princess, Miggery Sow and Chiaroscuro. Other characters may include the King, the cook, and the dungeon guard.
- Poster board or large panel or wall for display.
- Tape or other fixative to help secure yarn.

## Teaching Activity

1. Read the story *The Tale of Despereaux* by Kate DiCamillo.
2. As the story progresses, have students use different colored yarn on poster board or on a large flat space (wall or panel) to indicate the timeline for each major character. (Despereaux, the Princess, Miggery Sow and Chiaroscuro). NOTE: Because the story is not totally chronological and involves some flashbacks, students may have to add characters or go back and add choices. This is good, but the yarn should not be permanently affixed to allow additions. Tape may be a better choice than glue or paste.
3. Each character has choices in their life. These choices can be shown by making a fork in the yarn. One fork does not continue (the choice not made – opportunity cost), while the other does. (See example below.)
4. As characters' lives and choices intersect, begin to twist the yarn together to show how characters choices have consequences that affect others.
5. Choices may also separate characters from time to time.
6. Ask students to explain how the characters may have thought about their choices. What did the characters expect the consequences of their choice to be? Were the actual consequences different from what they expected?

