

Warton and The King of The Skies

By Russell E. Erickson | Illustrated by Lawrence Di Fiori

READING GUIDE

About the Book

Warton and Morton are toad siblings who face an adventure together that requires trust, patience, and their strong family bond to help a family of weasels learn cooperation. The third in the 50th anniversary reissue of this classic chapter book series for 6-8 year-olds that was hailed by Booklist in its starred review as “a small scale Wind in the Willows” and that the New York Times called “a parable of friendship.”

One hot summer’s day, the toads are doing everything they can to cool off. While sipping sweet huckleberryade, Morton tells his brother about his dreams of flying like a hawk through the air. Warton, wanting to surprise his brother, builds a contraption out of a washtub and tubes of dried snakeskin that will allow them to float in the sky, carried by the wind.

But when the wind gets too rough, the toads are launched through the woods, far down the river from their home. Before they can start the dangerous journey home, they’re captured by a family of weasels. Instead of eating them, the weasels offer a deal. If the toad can build the weasels’ new home, then they will be free to leave. But there’s just one issue: the weasels have no idea how to work together as siblings, and their fighting is getting in the way of Warton and Morton’s tasks.

Russell E. Erickson is the author of seven Warton and Morton books, originally published from 1974-1988. He was a lithographer whose other interests include photography, printing, carpentry, fishing, and puttering around in his vegetable patch and woodland garden. He lived in Bristol, Connecticut until his death in 2024.

Lawrence Di Fiori is the distinguished illustrator of all seven of the Warton and Morton books, more than 70 other books and countless magazine pieces. A Fine Arts graduate of the Philadelphia College of Art, his extensive works include painting, sculpture, comics, fine ink drawings, and exhibits in numerous museums. As a mentor and a scholar, he taught in art school and followed his curiosity toward beauty and aesthetics throughout his life. He died in 2022.



Key Themes:

Strong Sibling Relationships, Communication, Teamwork, Friendship

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Ages 6–8 years

Use these questions to preface and conclude a reading of this book with children. Encourage them to share their observations as you read the book together, and take time to linger on pages or spreads that generate more discussion.

Before Reading

- Can you tell how the characters are feeling by looking at the cover?
- What do you think is going to happen in this story?

While Reading

- How was Warton planning to help Morton cool off? (Chapter 4)
- Morton's ride went very well, but what happened when Warton took his turn to ride in the basket? (Chapter 8)
- Can you describe how the weasels treated each other, how they treated Warton and Morton, and what their home was like? (Chapter 17)
- Why was Warton frustrated when he was trying to rebuild the weasel's home? (Chapter 24)
- Warton and Morton taught Fred how to play checkers. The next morning what were the weasels doing? What was changing about the weasels' behaviors? (Chapter 29)

After Reading

- What happened to Freda and how did the king of the skies help save her?
- Do you think the weasels learned to work together and care for each other? What did they do at the end of this story that showed that?

Optional: Extension Activity

- Design your own King of the Skies. You can draw, paint, or use various art materials (popsicle sticks, construction paper, string) to create it.
- Draw a picture of the weasel's home. Include some of the different rooms in it.
- Write a new ending to the story where Warton and Morton decide to stay and live with the weasels.