



World Words

King Rat

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Student's Activities

Pre-Listening Activity 1

This piece is called 'King Rat'. Just the word 'rat' sends a shiver down the spine of many people. Some people may develop a phobia about the creatures (*musophobia*). In most cultures, rats hold a position of fear or disgust.



A. Look at the list of words and phrases. Some of them are taken from the text you will listen to and read and describe rats. Some of them are not from the text and may describe something other than rats. Use a dictionary, and decide which words you think describe rats and make a separate list of them.

curls up cosily
dank
darkness
filth
jumps excitedly
laps
licks gently
noiselessly
prances
purrs
raises gooseflesh
rattling with long nails
rubbish

scale roofs
scratches
scuttle
slide silently
slip away
slither down
smooth
soft
spill over
squeeze between
trots
wags tail
weave

1. Why do these words remind you of rats?
2. Which animals might the remaining words describe? Why?

B. In the text, the author uses the 'voice' of the rat in the first person. At one point, the rat says:

"I have business tonight."

What business do you think the rat would have that night? Use some of the words in your list about rats above to describe this business.

Pre-listening Activity 2

You will hear the author talking about an extract from his novel, and some students discussing their reaction to it. Read through the following comments which are made in the broadcast and decide first who was speaking - the author or the students - and then decide if they were discussing the **atmosphere** created or perhaps the **city** in which the story is set, or are they talking about possible **deeper meanings**? Or they might be talking about **metaphors**. Then listen to the broadcast to check your answers.

- a. "It made me think that it went over this building fluidly and smoothly but at the same time, like mercury, it was heavy, dense....."
- b. "The words make it more graphic. All these words - like 'filth' - make it more real in my mind."
- c. "...it doesn't look out of control. I wanted this sense of him rushing but with an extraordinary kind of enclosed control"
- d. "Whenever you visit London you are within 10 feet of a rat, or something like that."
- e. "I don't think it is the job of the writer to say what these levels are because all books are collaborations between writers and readers so I hope the reader will find meanings in them."
- f. "... a kind of organism that is breathing, that's making noise, that has skin, that has lungs, that has a voice box"
- g. You learn all the different levels of a rat's life and for me it was a kind of roller coaster ride of London.
- h. "I'm very much a Londoner and have lived here all my life and it feels very much part of me."
- i. "This character who is speaking is a supernatural figure. He looks like a man but he is the king of the rats, and he is a rat, and he does sometimes bring death."
- j. "I don't know how to describe it other than dark. It was ominous."
- k. "It's as if death is on their back, whispering and waiting to claim that life."
- l. "I wanted the book to open creepily, forbiddingly, so that people were maybe a little chilled, but also intrigued."

	atmosphere	the city	deeper meanings	metaphors
The author				
The students				



After Listening Activities

1. What happens next in the story?
What is attracting the rat to the building? Is his 'business tonight' in this building? What is in the building? What is the bait?

Write or tell what happens next. - and remember that the title is 'King Rat', not just 'Rat'!



2. In the interview, there is some discussion about metaphors. Which metaphors did you find especially striking?