

# Rats

Extraordinary creatures or disgusting pests? Depends on who you ask.

## About the Story

**Lexile:** 820L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to *Scope Online*.

**Learning Objective:** to analyze and compare tone in two articles about rats

**Key Skills:** text features, tone, figurative language, key ideas and details, text structure, author's purpose, synthesis

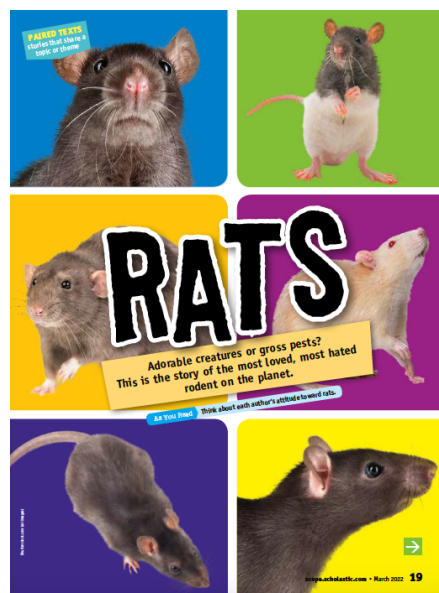
### Essential Questions:

- How do readers know what an author's purpose is?
- How do writers express attitude through writing?
- What happens when we explore different perspectives?

### Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.7, R.9, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to *Scope Online*.



## Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at [scope.scholastic.com](https://scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- Article read-alouds
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

### Video:

- The *Scope* Toolkit: What's the Tone?

### Connected reading from the *Scope* archives:

- "You Won't Believe What This Rat Can Do!"

### Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Play With Words: Collective Nouns for Groups of Animals
  - Preparing to Write: Analyzing Tone
  - Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
  - Close Reading and Critical Thinking
  - Choice Board
  - Core Skills Workout: Text Evidence\*
  - Quiz\*
  - Contest Entry Form
- \*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

## 1. Preparing to Read

20 minutes

**Do Now: Play with Words.** (10 minutes)

- Project Task 1 below for students to complete in their journals or on a piece of a paper as they enter the room. (Or use our **handout**, available in your Resources tab.)

**Task 1:** A collective noun refers to a group of people or things—like family or team. The collective nouns used for groups of animals can often be strange, funny, or extremely fitting—like a swarm of bees or a cackle of hyenas. In the box below, match each collective noun on the left with the group of animals you think it refers to on the right.

Collective Noun	Animal
crash	hippopotamuses
tower	penguins
tuxedo	owls
lounge	cats
destruction	sharks
bloat	crows
parade	lizards
shiver	rhinoceroses
murder	giraffes
parliament	elephants

- Share and discuss the correct matches with students: a crash of rhinoceroses, a tower of giraffes, a tuxedo of penguins, a lounge of lizards, a destruction of cats, a bloat of hippopotamuses, a parade of elephants, a shiver of sharks, a murder of crows, and a parliament of owls. Then project Task 2:

**Task 2:** Imagine it's your job to come up with the collective noun for referring to a group of rats. What would you call them? You can propose more than one name if you'd like! Be prepared to explain why you chose the name[s] you did.

- Invite students to share the collective nouns they came up with for rats. After everyone has shared, discuss: What do the collective nouns we proposed reveal about rats and our attitudes toward them? Share with students that a group of rats is commonly referred to as

a *mischievous*, and ask them if they think this name fits. Then tell them that today they will read two articles that present two very different perspectives on rats.

### Watch a Video (5 minutes)

- Show the *Scope* Toolkit “What’s the Tone?” video. Pass out our **Tone Words** reference page, a bank of words to help students identify tone in any text.

### Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your board. Review the words and complete the activity as a class or in groups. Highlighted words: *abundance*, *contaminated*, *culprits*, *scourge*. (Optionally, share the interactive link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently beforehand. The audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides.)

## 2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

“Ewwww!”

- Have a volunteer read the **As You Read** box that appears on page 19 of the magazine and at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the article through once as a class. Optionally, have students listen to author Allison Friedman read her article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Have students reread the article silently to themselves. Then pose the following close-reading questions to the class. Have students share their thinking with a partner first, then expand the share into a whole-class discussion.

### Close-Reading Questions

(20 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. Consider the title, subtitle, and opening photograph. What attitude toward rats do these text features convey? (text features, tone) “Ewwww!” is an expression of disgust. The subtitle is a list of three troublesome and damaging things rats do to humans. And the rat in the photograph is wet, filthy, and sitting on top of a sewer grate with body language and a facial expression that make him appear to be up to no good. These text features convey a negative attitude toward rats.

2. **How does author Allison Friedman use figurative language in the introduction? How does this shape the tone of the article?** (figurative language, tone) *Throughout the introduction, Friedman uses war metaphors to describe humans' relationship with rats. She presents rats as powerful "enemies" that we've been "locked in battle" with for thousands of years. She describes the costs of this war—billions of dollars and millions of lives—and lists our failed attempts to "defeat our enemies." This language reveals her point of view that rats are deadly, damaging, and out of control.*
3. **Friedman writes that "rats did more than just get on our nerves. They also brought misery and death." According to the article, what misery and death are rats responsible for?** (key ideas and details) *Rats contributed to the spread of the plague, a disease that killed nearly 200 million people, as well as many other deadly diseases. Rats continue to spread diseases to people and destroy property and food. They've also caused the extinction of species and put others at risk.*
4. **How does the section "Cleaning Up Our Nests" contribute to the article? How does it relate to the introduction?** (text structure) *In the final line of the introduction, Friedman says of the war that's raging between rats and humans, "scientists aren't so sure that we're going to win." The section "Cleaning Up Our Nests" explains the obstacle that prevents humans from bringing rats under control today: us, specifically our mishandling of garbage and a changing climate. Scientist Robert Corrigan offers steps we can all take to help—picking up litter, sealing lids, discarding less. He brings back the war metaphor, saying that taking these steps gives us "our best chance of winning the war against rats."*

**"Awwww!"**

- Read the article as a class. Optionally, have students listen to author Kristin Lewis read the article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- As a class, discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions, which apply to both articles.

### Close-Reading Questions

(5 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. **Consider the title, subtitle, and opening photograph. What attitude toward rats do these text features convey?** (text features, tone) *The text features convey a positive attitude toward rats. The title, "Awwww!," is an exclamation of appreciation for cuteness or sweetness, the subtitle*

*has a heart in it and suggests we should love rats, and the rats in the photograph are clean, soft, and snuggling sweetly on a blanket.*

2. **Compare the language authors Allison Friedman and Kristin Lewis use to describe rats' climbing abilities. How does this language convey different tones?** (tone) Friedman describes rats that "claw their way up the sides of buildings" like "villains from a superhero movie." By casting rats as the evil character in a superhero movie, Friedman sounds unnerved by rats' impressive climbing abilities. In contrast, Lewis calls rats "the Spider-Mans of the rodent world." She says, "Thanks to their long claws, rats are great climbers," adding that "they can drop to the ground from 50 feet without so much as a stubbed toe." Lewis's tone is impressed and amazed.
3. **Compare the details Lewis and Friedman include related to the topic of disease. How do these details affect your understanding of rats?** (tone) Friedman includes statistics about the plague, the number of diseases that can be spread by rats, and the total number of deaths caused by such diseases in the past 1,000 years. Lewis includes a detail about the APOPO rats that have been trained to detect disease in humans. The details in Friedman's article express concern about rats' negative impact on human health, while the detail about APOPO rats expresses admiration and appreciation for a way rats can improve human health. Seeing both types of details helps readers understand that rats are highly intelligent and can help us, but that the scale of harm they've caused to human health is unimaginable.

### Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. **How would you characterize rats: adorable creatures or gross pests? In what ways, if any, do you think differently about rats after reading these articles?** *Answers will vary.*
2. **Imagine you had read only one of the articles. How would your understanding of rats be different if you had read only "Ewww!"? Only "Awww!"?** *Answers will vary.*
3. **What's the connection between an author's tone and an author's purpose? What was Friedman's purpose? Lewis's?** *Answers will vary. Students may offer that tone is how an author presents their attitude, perspective, and emotions about the subject matter to a reader, like a strategy for connecting with readers and creating a certain reaction in them. Evaluating tone helps readers better understand a text and what an author's purpose in writing a text is—such as raising awareness, persuading readers to do something, entertaining them, changing their minds, etc. Friedman clearly intends to inform readers about the problems rats cause—problems that need the serious attention of scientists as well as everyone else. Lewis presents the opposite view of rats—not as reviled creatures but as extraordinary ones worthy of respect and admiration.*
4. **Can an author's tone change throughout a text?** *Students may offer that an article can have a general tone, but that individual sections or lines can have a unique tone. For example, in the*

section “Traps, Poison, and Dogs,” Friedman has an urgent tone as she discusses species that have gone extinct or are at risk because of rats, saying, “Clearly, something has to be done.” Then, in the same section, when talking about rats eating almost anything, Friedman writes, “(Soap? Delicious! Shoe leather? Yes, please! Glue? Yum!).” Here, her tone is humorous.

### 3. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Analyzing Tone**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the prompt on page 24 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.
- Alternatively, have students choose a culminating task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of differentiated activities.

#### Connected readings from the *Scope* archives:

##### About rats:

- [Short Read: “You Won’t Believe What This Rat Can Do!” \(May 2017\)](#)

##### Animals causing problems for humans:

- [Paired Texts: “The Fish That’s Eating the World” and “Invasion of the Giant Goldfish” \(February 2019\)](#)
- [Paired Texts: “Swarms of Terror” \(March 2018\)](#)
- [Paired Texts: “The Great Bird Poop Disaster” and “How to Solve the Problem of Bird Poop” \(November 2017\)](#)

##### Misunderstood animals:

- [Narrative Nonfiction: “Saving America’s Wolves” \(May 2018\)](#)
- [Narrative Nonfiction: “Stalking the Bat Killer” \(May 2019\)](#)