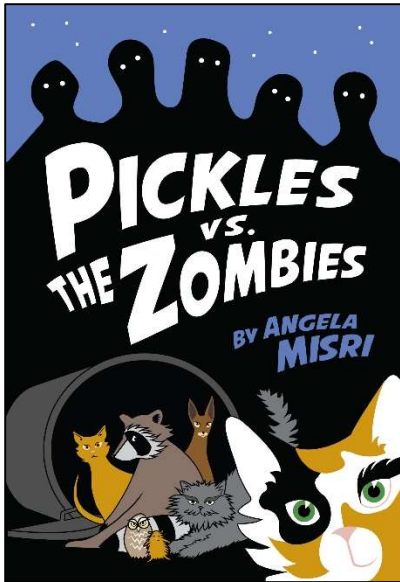


# DCB

[www.dcbyoungreaders.com](http://www.dcbyoungreaders.com)

## ***Pickles vs. The Zombies* by Angela Misri Teacher's Guide**

Created by Martha Brack Martin with support from Angela Misri and the Cormorant Team



When author Angela Misri's pre-teen daughter complained there were no good creepy zombie books for kids her age, Angela quickly decided to write some! Her *Tails of the Apocalypse* series is a kid-friendly take on the end of the world (zombie-style), with just enough gore and humour to engage even the most reluctant reader.

### Themes

Some key themes and “big ideas” in this book include:

- Family
- Friendship
- Loss
- Finding your courage
- Bullying
- Loyalty
- Dealing with change
- Determination

### The Plot

Pickles is a sweet young housecat who loves her life with her two-year-old pet, Connor. They share their house with Wally, an older cat who acts as Pickles' mentor, and Wally's pets who are Connor's parents.

One day the cats notice some neighbourhood humans acting oddly. They have attacked an older human – and are *eating it right on the street!* Thanks to television and books, the cats recognize zombies when they see them. When the family’s humans don’t return home, Pickles understands that life never be the same again. Unwilling to wait and hope her humans return, she decides to set out on a search for Connor, even though she’s never been outside. She sets off with a local streetwise cat named Ginger while Wally protects their home. Soon Ginger and Pickles join forces with another companion, a very clumsy raccoon named Trip. The three find themselves facing one dangerous situation after another as they follow Connor’s trail, but Pickles won't give up. As they journey onward, reuniting with former friends and meeting new ones, the little fellowship learns that finding family is sometimes as easy as opening your eyes.

## The Setting

This story takes place in the near future, when a plague has created a zombie apocalypse in a large urban community in North America.

## What Kind of Reader Will Love This Book? One who...

- Enjoys stories about zombies
- Loves tales told from animal points of view
- Is obsessed with cats
- Appreciates epic adventures
- Enjoys humorous stories sprinkled with a bit of gore

## Pre-Teaching Prep

Warning: This book deals with big ideas about loss and death, though they are balanced with comical, fun and quirky characters. Some students will need to be prepared for the darker elements before you begin the novel.

## Chapter Questions (for Independent Work or Class Discussion)

Pick and choose the questions that work for *your* students in *your* classroom. Use as many or as few as you like.

### Pages 1-13\*

1. When we first meet Pickles and Wally, we learn quite a bit about them. Create a T-chart and record everything we learn about each of them using jot notes.
2. In your opinion, why does Pickles take directions from Wally?
3. When the humans break into the house, why do you think the man returns the juice box to the cupboard and opens the cat door? What does this tell us about him?

### Pages 14 - 24

4. Why is Ginger always hanging out at Pickle and Wally’s house? Explain your ideas.
5. Translate the following sentence into your own words:

“As neither of us were outdoor cats, we’d never spoken, but her tail often transmitted scathing messages about the borders between her house and ours that sent Wally into a tizzy.” (p. 20)

6. What do Ginger and Pickles learn from Vance when they hop onto his roof?

Pages 25 - 40

7. Pickles is very observant. What are some of the things she’s noticed and pondered on the journey so far?
8. What do we learn about Trip in this section?
9. Make a list of the kinds of things the eagles say to the three companions. How does the author use these moments to add humour to the story?

Pages 41 - 63

10. Make a prediction about what will happen to Trip now that the travelers are separated. Justify your prediction with evidence from the text.
11. Pickles mentions a list of the worst things for a cat (p. 53). Why do you think cucumbers are on that list? What might number four be?
12. Write a summary of the events in the chapter entitled Day 13.

Pages 64 -74

13. Pickles realizes in the previous chapter that Ginger is not as uncaring as he has appeared. What other conclusions can we draw about the travelling trio and their true personalities from the last few chapters? Explain with details from the story and your own ideas.
14. Pickles has a life-changing encounter in this section of the book. Why do you think the characters of Hannah, Bast, Liona and Jaguar act the way they do?
15. Throughout the book, the cats have made mention of “the Saber” (e.g., 72). What is a saber, and why do you suppose the cats refer to it so frequently?

Pages 75 - 82

16. Pickles makes some interesting observations about the animals she meets in the train car. How does the author inject this scene with humour, despite Pickles being seriously injured? Explain.
17. Describe what we learn about Hannah’s past adventures before she met Pickles.

Pages 83 – 93

18. What are three adjectives you would choose to describe Emmy the hamster? Prove your choices are good by using quotations from the story that show what you mean.
19. This section is full of action. How does the author build suspense as the action goes forward? Explain.
20. Were you surprised by the “reunion” plot twist in this section of the book? Why or why not?

Pages 94 - 106

21. Define the underlined words in the quotations below. Use a dictionary to help you.
  - a. "Oh, indubitably, Jaguar, we did." (p. 71)
  - b. "Our slave names were moronic, so we adopted new ones..." (p. 71)
  - c. "We set out the next morning at dawn with the blessings of our equine friends." (p. 94)
22. Pickles is clearly a very well-educated and naturally smart cat. Give two examples where we have seen examples of her intelligence in the book so far. Use quotations to prove your examples.
23. Why do you think Emmy keeps up her patrol, even though she can't see in the dark of the tunnel? Explain.

Pages 107 - 120

24. What does Pickles mean when she says Trip was "weaving about like an over-nipped old tabby" (p. 109)?
25. Pickles and Hannah have really come to care for each other. What clues does the author give to show their connection to each other in this part of the book?
26. How does the expression "out of the frying pan and into the fire" fit this section of the story?
27. How do the friends outsmart the chipmunks?

Pages 121 - 142

28. Throughout the novel, the author uses references to movies and books, like when Pickles compares her group to the "fellowship" in *The Lord of the Rings* (p. 95). Why do you think the author uses these references? Explain your ideas.
29. Humans have again been introduced into the story. How does the author keep the animals believable as the characters we've come to know and love, yet still manage to show us they really are animals, as far as the humans are concerned?
30. Emmy and Pickles meet yet another new friend after becoming separated from the rest of their group. Give two reasons why his name is particularly appropriate?

Pages 143 – 152

31. What does Pickles mean in the quote when she says, "Pal was sobbing uncontrollably, so I directed my question to Emmy, who, despite all odds, was the rational one of the pair" (p. 146).
32. Despite the dangerous situation in which the friends themselves, the author manages to provide humour in this section. Describe one example of this in these pages.
33. The animals clearly see this as a rescue mission, and Wally's military background comes in handy. What are some military references the author includes to remind us of Wally's expertise?

Pages 153 – 164 (at the break of the text, after Pickles says, "I have an idea!")

34. How does the author show us that Emmy is less traumatized than she was when she met the group at the train car?
35. When Pickles says, "I have an idea," (p. 164), what do you predict it is? Prove your prediction using evidence from the text and your own ideas.
36. Do you think Pickles' idea might work? Why or why not?

Pages 164 (after the text break) - end

37. Pickles says "Stealth is going to be key, but so is ruthlessness" (p.165).
  - a. What does "stealth," mean?
  - b. How would you define "ruthlessness?"
  - c. What does Pickles mean when she says the humans are "livid that their attack had gone awry" (p. 168)? Explain.
38. Who comes to rescue Pickles and Emmy...and then who comes to rescue them and their rescuers, leading them back to the safe house?
39. What very important reunion happens on page 171? Were you surprised this reunion occurred? Why or why not?
40. The last chapter is titled Day One. Why is this so appropriate?
41. Outline the key events in the last chapter. Use jot notes to save time, if your teacher permits.

\*Page numbers are in reference to the First Edition, ISBN 978-1-77086-558-7, published in 2019.

## Culminating Activities

Give students the opportunity to make connections to the world and themselves, as well as to other texts, and to choose their own way of demonstrating them. Here are some other activities to consider at the end of the novel:

### Research Roundup

Think about the various topics introduced in the book. These could include how animals adapt to survive, the characteristics of the animal species featured in the book, Zombies in literature, plagues in history, or even early defensive structures, like barricades. Where would you find information about these topics? What would be interesting to share with others?

Research a topic introduced in the novel, independently or in groups. Then present your learning and research through an infographic or other creative presentation model of your choice.

### Go Graphic!

Select a favourite scene or part of the novel. Think about how you could portray it visually. What would you want to include? How would you show what happens with minimum text? What colours would you use? What perspectives would you show?

Now create your own version of a graphic novel to portray that section. Create a spread of either 8 or 16 panels, or as your teacher prefers. Use conventions of graphic novels, like panels, gutters, captions, etc. Learn more about what goes into a great graphic novel here:

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-create-a-comic-book-step-by-step-guide-for-making-your-own-comics#what-are-the-elements-of-a-good-comic-book>

### Sounds Like...

Pick three scenes in the book where you could really “see” the action happening. Imagine these scenes are part of a movie adaptation of the book. What kinds of sound effects or songs would best fit the scenes in the “movie” you imagine?

Design the “soundtrack” for the three scenes you’ve selected. Think about what sound effects might fit well with the action. Research which songs would be particularly fabulous. Find a minimum of three songs and two sound effects. You may even want to create an “audiobook” or old-fashioned “radio play” of the scenes, with the songs and sound effects in the background. Share the soundtrack with your class.

### What’s the Plan?

Think about the military operation plan the animals create to save the humans at the safehouse. We don’t learn all the details until it happens, but clearly Wally used his military knowledge to design it. How was the group divided? What were the steps involved?

Draw a military operation plan that Wally and the team might have designed for the climax of the book. Make sure your plan of attack includes a diagram of the areas involved, and that it shows the various operations happening in those areas. You can create it from Wally’s point of view, or from the perspective of Pickles (which would feature what actually happened, more than the original plan.) You can use graph paper to show the scale you imagine would be accurate for the scene. You could also use a drawing program on a device of your choice.

### Interview with the Author

**Martha:** Hi Angela! Thanks for chatting with me.

**Angela:** Are you kidding? I’m thrilled to be here!

**Martha:** I understand you wrote Pickles’ story after a conversation with your daughter. Can you tell us more about that?

**Angela:** Good fact-checking! Yes, when my daughter was 13, she really wanted to watch The Walking Dead tv show, and I barely thought I was old enough to watch that show, let alone her! But, as a longtime fan of Stephen King, I understand the attraction to the scary, gory story, so I decided to write her a zombie story that was more appropriate for her age. That’s where *Pickles* came from.

**Martha:** Your daughter may have given you the inspiration for Pickles...but I hear a certain cat had a hand in it as well?



**Angela:** She's pretty famous at this point, so it's hard to get her on camera, but yes, my calico cat, Copernicus, is at least the physical inspiration for the Pickles character. In terms of personality, they couldn't be more different though.

**Martha:** Oh, tell us more!

**Angela:** Whereas Pickles is basically a kitten, unsure of herself, and wide-eyed about the outside world, Copper's been around a while (she's 17) and is more like Wally in personality than Pickles. That said, Copper is an indoor cat, so much of her apprehension about outdoor animals did get pulled into Pickle's scenes.

**Martha:** Where did the inspiration for your young adult series, the Portia Adams Adventures, originate? (These are young adult novels, right? About a young Canadian in the 1930s with a connection to Sherlock Holmes and Watson, who ends up finding herself solving mysteries?)

**Angela:** Ah, Portia Adams was another story that fed a need – in this case, my need for more Sherlock Holmes stories.

**Martha:** I share that need! <grin>

**Angela:** I read the original canon when I was very young, with my father, and then again when I was writing my senior thesis in university. Once I finished the original stories written by Arthur Conan Doyle, I found myself longing for more stories about Baker Street and London. That's where Portia appeared – a young Canadian woman living at Baker Street solving mysteries the way Holmes and Watson did before her.

**Martha:** I can't wait to read these!

**Angela:** I have some of the best fans in the world (and all over the world) for Portia's stories, some as old as 80 and some as young as 8. She seems to reach all lovers of mystery!

**Martha:** When you first started writing *Pickles vs. The Zombies*, did you have any idea you'd end up writing a series there too? You must be excited that the third book, Emmy's story, is coming out in May 2022.

**Angela:** Not at all! I wrote Pickles as a stand-alone story (after having written three Portia Adams books in a row). But when I got to the end of *Pickles VS the Zombies*, I found myself thinking about the other great characters I had met along the way – Trip, Wally, Ginger, Hannah, Emmy, and Pal. I started to think about how all our experiences (even when we're in the same situation) are so different, and how that would feel in a book that changed points of

view. Coming out of *Pickles*, Trip felt like the next voice to hear from. And then when kids started reading *Pickles* and *Trip of the Dead*, they begged me for a story about Emmy.

**Martha:** Emmy *is* an icon! I can see that (though I have to say, our hamsters were never in her league!) What is your writing process like? Are you an “outliner” or a “fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants” kind of writer?

**Angela:** It depends on the story! For the Pickles books, I’m a bit of a pantsier; I have an idea of the journey I want the main character to make, but no real plan to get there. For Portia and other books I’ve written, I’m more of a plotter.

**Martha:** We know you’re a brilliant writer of books for children and young adults, but you have quite a diverse background in other creative outlets. How have these other experiences influenced your writing?

**Angela:** Aw, very kind of you to say! I like to tell people that I spend my mornings writing fiction and my afternoons creating non-fiction because I’m also a journalist. I’ve been fortunate enough to create a lot of different things over my career, including podcasts, features, academic papers, and screenplays. A few years ago, I won a contest with the Canadian Film Centre that gave me a year of training in how to adapt fiction work into screenplays, and that has probably been the biggest influence on my writing since my university days. Even editors who read my work before and after that training year have pointed out that my writing got so much more visual after the CFC workshops.

**Martha:** Rumour has it you’re quite a gamer. Your *Tails of the Apocalypse* series feels like a video game at times, with all its action (and ZOMBIES!) How much do you think your gaming has influenced your writing?

**Angela:** Ha! It’s true, I’ve played games all my life – from *Dungeons and Dragons* to *World of Warcraft*. I think between the gaming and my massive graphic novel/comic book collection it is safe to say that I LOVE a good hero arc. I’d love to write the storyline for a Marvel comic someday – it’s on my bucket list!

**Martha:** Well, it sounds like you have the perfect pedigree for that! Speaking of heroes, your characters in *Pickles vs. the Zombies* all turn out to be brave at heart. I really liked that. It was refreshing that you didn’t go with the stereotypical setup of one hero and a bunch of weaker characters as foils. Were you trying to send a message to your readers?

**Angela:** I think as someone who thinks of herself as a superhero (truth) I have learned to recognize a lot of different kinds of bravery in the humans around me. Some, like me, are extroverts, who will show up at the protest, or write that letter, or go for the big committee work where they feel they can make change. And some are more likely to support those people or show up as backup, or just be there to listen. All of that takes bravery.



**Martha:** Some adults might have concerns about the violence in the book, though you balance it so well with humour. How would you respond to that concern?

**Angela:** Well, as a parent and a teacher I'd say you know your kid, so go with your gut. My kid wanted a little scary in her bookshelf, so that worked for us, but my 9-year-old nephew is too scared to read *Pickles*, so that doesn't work for him (his 8-year-old sister is all in btw). You couldn't drag me to The Babysitter's Club series when I was a kid, but half my friends were obsessed with it. Every reader is different, and we have to respect that. What I would say is that in a world where *The Hunger Games* series kills 30 kids in each book, my books are pretty light on the death and gore. The zombies are scary, but not in-your-face-scary, and let's remember, they are pretty easily defeated by a Thor-worshipping hamster.

**Martha:** What do you hope to inspire in your readers as they turn the last page?

**Angela:** That stepping outside your comfort zone is worth it, and that picking friends who will have your back is incredibly important to your basic mission of growing up. Friends who bully you, or make you feel bad for being you, or just make you someone you're not, are not quality friends. Seek out the quality friends, grow with them, support them as they support you. That's the message in (I hope) all of my books.

## About Angela Misri:

Angela Misri is an author and journalist of Indian descent. She was born in London, U.K. and briefly lived in Buenos Aires before moving to Canada in 1982. Angela is the author of the Portia Adams Adventures series and several essays on Sherlock Holmes. She earned her BA in English Literature from the University of Calgary and her MA in Journalism from the University of Western Ontario. As a former CBC Radio digital manager and the Digital Director at The Walrus, Angela is never offline (although she prefers to write long form in notebooks). Angela plays MMORPGs, speaks several web languages, and owns too many comic books. She currently lives in Toronto, ON.

## Awards and Recognition for *Pickles vs. the Zombies*

WINNER, 2021 Hackmatack Children's Choice Awards, English Fiction Category  
SHORTLISTED, 2021, MYCRA Sundogs Award

## Related Weblinks and Resources for Further Learning

[Trip of the Dead by Angela Misri | Author Interview | Tales from the Apocalypse](#)

[Finding time to write with Angela Misri](#)

[Joel A Sutherland and Angela Misri present How to Write Scary Stories](#)

[One Fictitious Moment YouTube series](#)