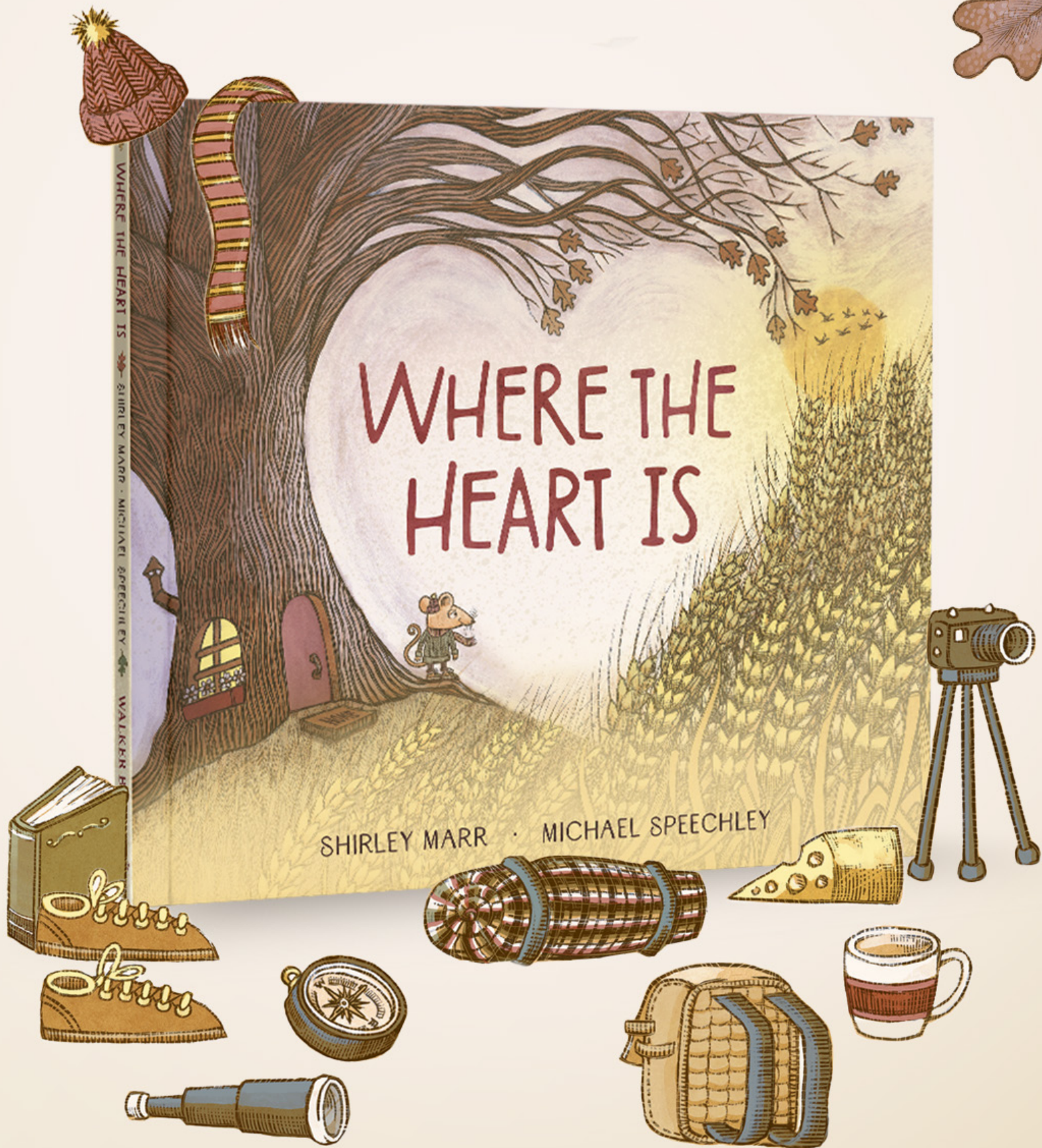


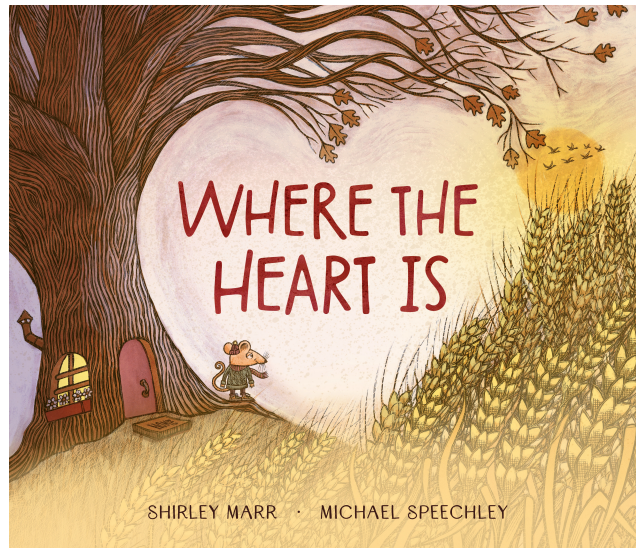


TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Belinda Bolliger

WALKER BOOKS

About the BOOK



WHERE THE HEART IS

CREATORS: SHIRLEY MARR & MICHAEL SPEECHLEY

ISBN 9781760659783 HARDBACK

JUNE 2026

A heart-warming story of longing - and belonging, from the award-winning creators of ONE DAY

A mouse who has only ever lived in his little house in a field contemplates the great migrations that other creatures make – geese flying home for the summer, arctic terns soaring from one pole to the other, wildebeest moving over two countries, humans searching for sun in the winter. With a fear of missing out, Mouse feels like he must embark on a journey of his own, only to find that his purpose and importance is right where he is.

For ages 4+

About the AUTHOR

Shirley Marr is the author of the award-winning *A Glasshouse of Stars*, which won the CBCA Book of the Year for Younger Readers 2022. The book was also the winner of the Western Australian Premier's Book Award Writing for Children, shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards and Readings Children's Fiction Prize, and nominated for the Carnegie Medal. Shirley's middle grade novel *Countdown to Yesterday* was published in 2024 (Penguin Random House Australia, Simon & Schuster US and Usborne UK). She is the author of *One Day*, illustrated by Michael Speechley.

About the ILLUSTRATOR

Michael Speechley has been a graphic designer and high school art teacher in WA. His first picture book, *The All New Must Have Orange 430* was shortlisted and awarded as an Honour Book in the Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Children's Book of the Year Award in 2019, and was the winner of The Wilderness Society's 2019 Environment Award for Children's Literature, Picture Books. His second book, *The Gift*, was published in September 2019. It was a Notable Book in the 2020 CBCA Book of the Year Awards, and was shortlisted for the 2019 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards. Michael is the illustrator of *One Day*, written by Shirley Marr.

THEMES

Home; Belonging; Friendship; Holidays; Seasons and cycles; Migration;
Listening to your heart voice; Loneliness; Choice and independence;
Perspective and gratitude; Hope and renewal.

Curriculum Areas

English (Foundation–Year 2); **Science** (Foundation–Year 2);
Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS); **The Arts** (Visual Arts and
Drama); **Personal and Social Capability**

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Sustainability

Writing style

Shirley Marr uses restrained, evocative and simple language to convey complex emotional experiences. The text is sparse, with carefully chosen words and phrases that allow young readers to engage imaginatively with the story. Repetition and rhythm create a gentle pace that mirrors Mouse's journey, both physical and emotional.

Illustration style

Michael Speechley's illustrations are rich in detail, created using traditional media (pen, ink and gouache). The artwork often extends or deepens the meaning of the text. Warm, earthy tones dominate, reflecting the seasonal shift from autumn to winter and reinforcing the mood of transition and stillness.

BEFORE READING

- As a class, look at the cover of the book:
 - What do you notice about Mouse?
 - Where is Mouse's home?
 - What season might this story take place in? How can you tell?
 - What might the story be about?
 - What shape do you see on the cover? What does this tell you about what sort of story this might be?
-

DURING AND AFTER READING

INTRODUCING VOCABULARY

- There are many poetic and evocative words and phrases in the story. Some of these may be new or unfamiliar:
 - Barley
 - Hearth
 - Stoke
 - Compass
 - Reap
 - Harvest Moon
- Write these words on the board and discuss their meanings together.
- Share what you think each word might mean.
- Use clues from the story and illustrations to help you.
- Look up meanings in a dictionary if needed.
- You may like to add other interesting or unfamiliar words from the text as you read.
- Choose a word such as 'stoke' or 'reap' and act out its meaning. Can the rest of the class guess the word?
- Draw a picture to represent each word (e.g., a glowing hearth, a field of barley, a large harvest moon).
- Word connections: Talk about how some words are linked to seasons or nature. Which words feel 'warm'? Which words feel 'cold' or 'quiet'?
- Write a sentence using each word. Try to make your sentence as descriptive as possible.
- Create a short poem using at least two of the vocabulary words.

EXPLORING LANGUAGE

- How would you describe the language used by the author to tell the story?
 - Is it simple or complex?
 - Is it fast paced or slow and calm?
 - How does the repetition affect the way the story feels? (For example, 'Mouse walks / and walks / and walks'.)
- Can you find examples of imagery (e.g., 'the sky is as empty as Mouse's heart')?
- How do the words help us understand Mouse's feelings?
- Choose a favourite sentence from the book and read it aloud. How does it make you feel? Why?

EXPLORING THE ILLUSTRATIONS

- How would you describe the illustrations?
- Are they detailed or simple?
- What materials or textures do they remind you of?
- What colours are used? How do they make you feel? How do they help tell the story?

- How do the illustrations show that the world is becoming quieter or emptier?
- How has the illustrator used shapes? For example, the heart shape on the cover. Look at the round shape on the first spread – what do you think this might represent?
- Look at how Mouse is placed on each page. Is he small or large? What does this tell us about how he feels?
- Find examples in the book where the illustrations:
 - Show something that is not written in the text.
 - Help you understand how Mouse is feeling.

LANGUAGE AND ILLUSTRATIONS TOGETHER

- How do the illustrations add to the meaning of the story?
- Do the words and pictures always show the same thing, or do the pictures add extra information?
- Which page is your favourite? Why?

HOME, SWEET HOME

- What is home? What makes a place feel like home?
- Can home be more than one place?
- Where is Mouse's home?
- Does Mouse think 'home' is a place, or something else?
- Can home be a feeling?
- Have you heard the saying, 'Home is where the heart is'? What do you think this means? How does it connect with the title of the book?
- What does it mean that 'Mouse feels the compass in his heart point in one direction'? (p. 15). What direction do you think the compass is pointing?
- Have you ever had a feeling tell you what to do?
- How do we know when to follow others and when to follow ourselves?
- Why does Mouse decide to return home? What does this tell us about belonging? Is Mouse missing out? Or is he gaining something different? What might that be?
- Mouse's home is in the trunk of a tree. If you could choose a special place to have a home, where would you choose? A tree? A boat on a river? A spaceship?
 - Create a collage of your imaginary home.
 - Who is there?
 - What makes it feel safe or happy?
 - Label some of the important parts of your home (eg, the bedroom, the living area, the games room).

LONELINESS AND FRIENDSHIP

- Who are Mouse's friends in the story? If Mouse's friends had names, what do you think they might be? Why?
- How does Mouse feel when his friends move away for the winter? Why do you think his heart is described as 'empty'? (pp. 9-10)
- How do the colours, space and details in the illustrations show Mouse's feelings?
- Have you ever felt like Mouse when you've been separated from friends or family? What helped you during that time?
- Look at the spread where Mouse decides to 'join those left behind to reap the ripened barley.' (pp. 16-17). What creatures can you see in their burrows? Do you think they might become Mouse's friends too? What does this moment tell us about making new connections?

- Why is friendship important?
- What makes someone a good friend?
- Can friendships change over time or in different seasons of life? How?
- Have you ever felt lonely?
- What can we do when we feel lonely if we can't be with our friends? (For example, keep busy, spend time in nature, create something, talk to family, remember happy times.)
- What does Mouse do to keep busy while his friends are away?
- What do you think helps Mouse feel less lonely?
- Draw a card for one of your friends and write a short sentence telling them what you appreciate about them.
- Draw an outline of a heart. Inside the heart, write or draw things that make you feel happy or less lonely.
- Imagine Mouse meets a new friend while his old friends are away. Draw or write about this new character. What are they like? What do they do together? How do they help Mouse?
- At the end of the story, do you think Mouse's heart still feels empty? Why or why not?
- What does the story teach us about loneliness, friendship and finding connection?

THE TURNING OF THE SEASONS

- What changes do you notice in the environment in the story (weather, colour, animals)?
- What seasons are shown in the story? What clues do the text and illustrations give you?
- Can you draw a simple diagram that shows the different seasons where you live? What happens during these different seasons? (For example, in spring, the weather becomes warmer. In autumn, leaves start to fall, etc.)
- 'For all around him is the changing colour. The satisfying crunch of leaves underfoot. The scent of woodsmoke in the air', (pp. 11-12). Write a few short, descriptive sentences to describe the things in your environment where you live during winter.
- As a class, go on a short outdoor walk and notice:
 - Sounds
 - Smells
 - Colours
- Back in the classroom, create a shared 'sensory word wall'.
- Think about change. How do you feel when things change? Do you like change or do you find it difficult? If you find it difficult, what could you do to make changes less challenging?

ON THE MOVE: ANIMAL MIGRATION

In the story, the geese fly south, the swallows fly away to find a sunny place and the monarch butterflies disappear. When animals travel from one place to another to find food, warmer weather, or a safe place to have their babies, this is called migration.

- Why might animals need to move from one place to another?
- What challenges do you think they face on their journey?
- Do all animals migrate at the same time of year or in the same way?
- In groups, research the migration habits of:
 - geese
 - swallows
 - monarch butterflies
- You might like to find out:
 - Where do they travel from and to?

- How far do they go?
- Why do they migrate?
- When do they migrate?
- Do they travel alone or in groups?
- Present your findings to the rest of the class.
- Do you know of any other animals that migrate?
- In small groups, choose a migrating animal to research and create a simple poster presentation to share with the class.
- Here are some ideas to get you started:
 - humpback whales
 - sea turtles
 - Arctic terns
 - caribou (reindeer)
 - salmon
 - zebra
 - fruit bats (flying foxes)
- Your poster should include:
 - The name of your animal
 - A map showing its migration journey
 - The distance it travels (if you can find it)
 - Why it migrates
 - When the migration happens
 - Any dangers or challenges along the way
 - An illustration or picture of the animal
- Imagine you are either the geese, swallows or monarch butterflies in the story. Describe one day on your migration. What can you see, feel and hear? Are you tired? Excited? Hungry?
- Act out your animal's journey. How does it move? Is it flying, swimming or walking? Does it travel quickly or slowly?
- How is Mouse different from the migrating animals?
- Does Mouse need to migrate to belong?

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

- **Seasons' wheel:** Based on the story, create a circular seasons chart:
 - summer (Mouse's friends are present)
 - autumn (Mouse's friends are getting ready to leave)
 - winter (stillness)
 - spring (return)
- Track what happens in each season (new growth, leaves falling, trees are bare etc).
- **Postcards from friends:** Inspired by the final pages, create a postcard to send to a friend.
- **'Where the heart is':** Make a paper heart compass. Draw a heart in the centre. Around it, add (write or draw) the things you like, the places where you feel safe and happy, the people you love.
 - Extension: How do these things help guide our choices?
- **Stay or go decision line:** Place a line across the classroom. One end of the line represents 'Stay like Mouse', the other end represents 'Go on a journey'. Where will you stand? Explain why.
- **What would you pack?** Look at the page where Mouse is getting ready to leave. What items does

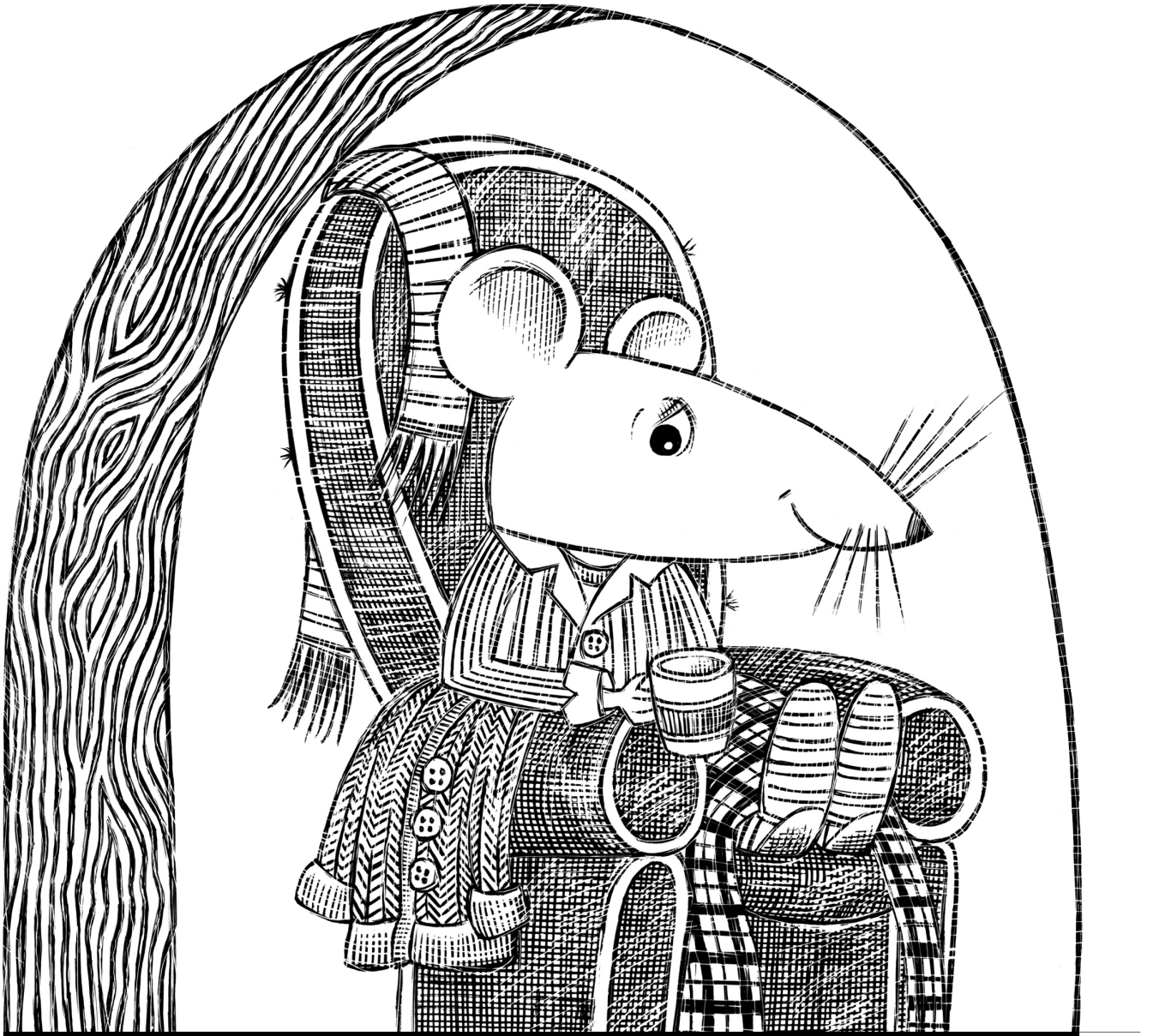
he pack? What uses do they have? What would you pack if you were going on a journey? Draw a picture, like the one of Mouse and his backpack, showing what you would choose to take with you.

- **Freeze frame feelings:** Create freeze frame poses showing loneliness, excitement, uncertainty, relief, joy.
- **Map making:** Create a simple map of Mouse's journey.
- **Class mural:** On a large sheet of paper, create a nighttime mural with a night sky, a big harvest moon, night creatures, and lots of stars – one for each member of the class.
- **Role play:** Should Mouse go? Act out a conversation. One person is Mouse and the rest of the class are migrating animals, trying to convince Mouse to join them.
- **Change the ending:** Create a different ending for Mouse: what if he had kept going? Where might he end up? How does he get there? Who does he meet? Does he find his friends? Does he make new friends along the way? How does he feel when he returns home?

MOUSE in HOUSE

Pre-Walk Colour-In

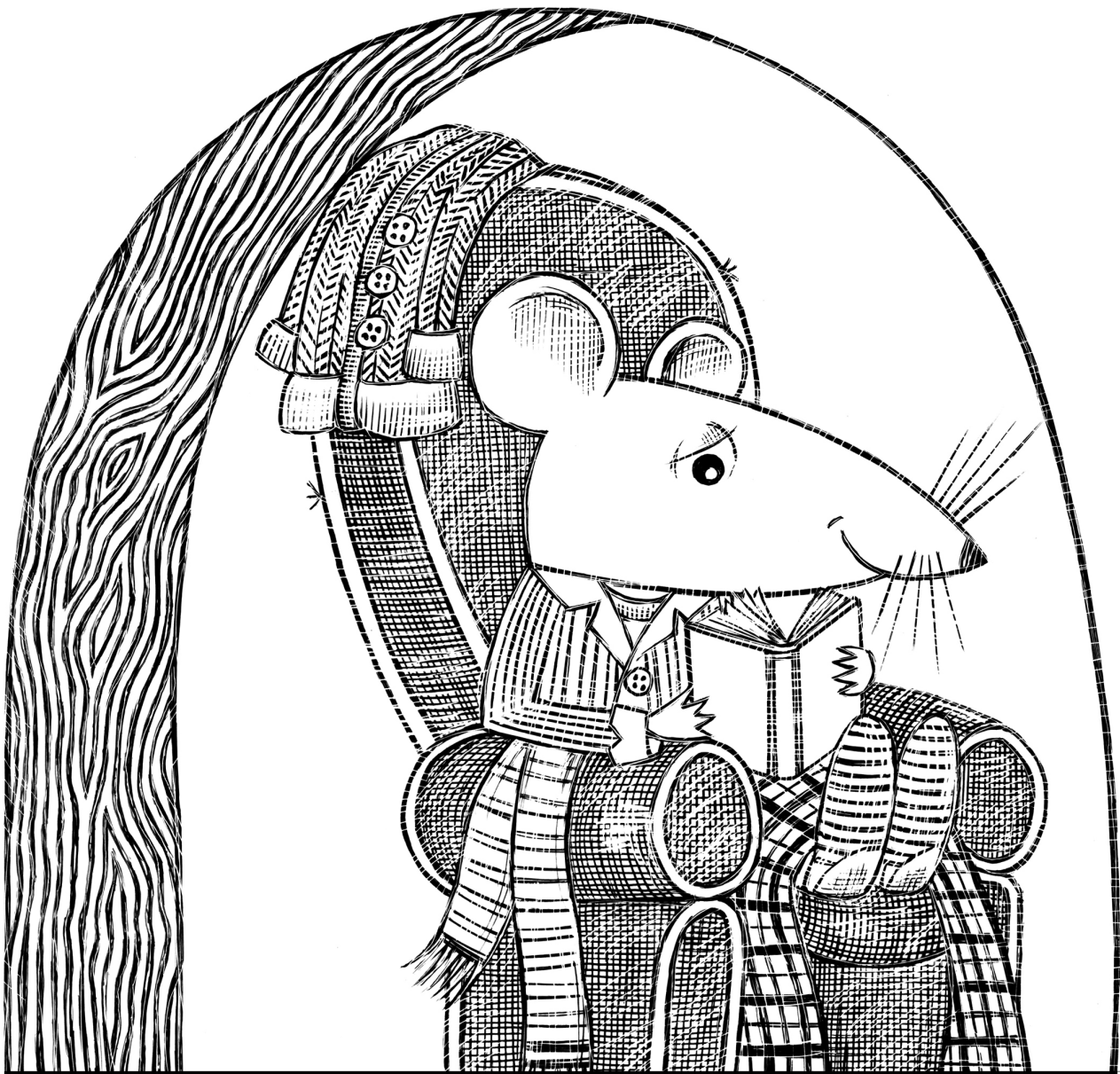
Colour this in, cut it out and blue-tac it to the wall near the floor.



MOUSE in HOUSE

Post-Walk Colour-In

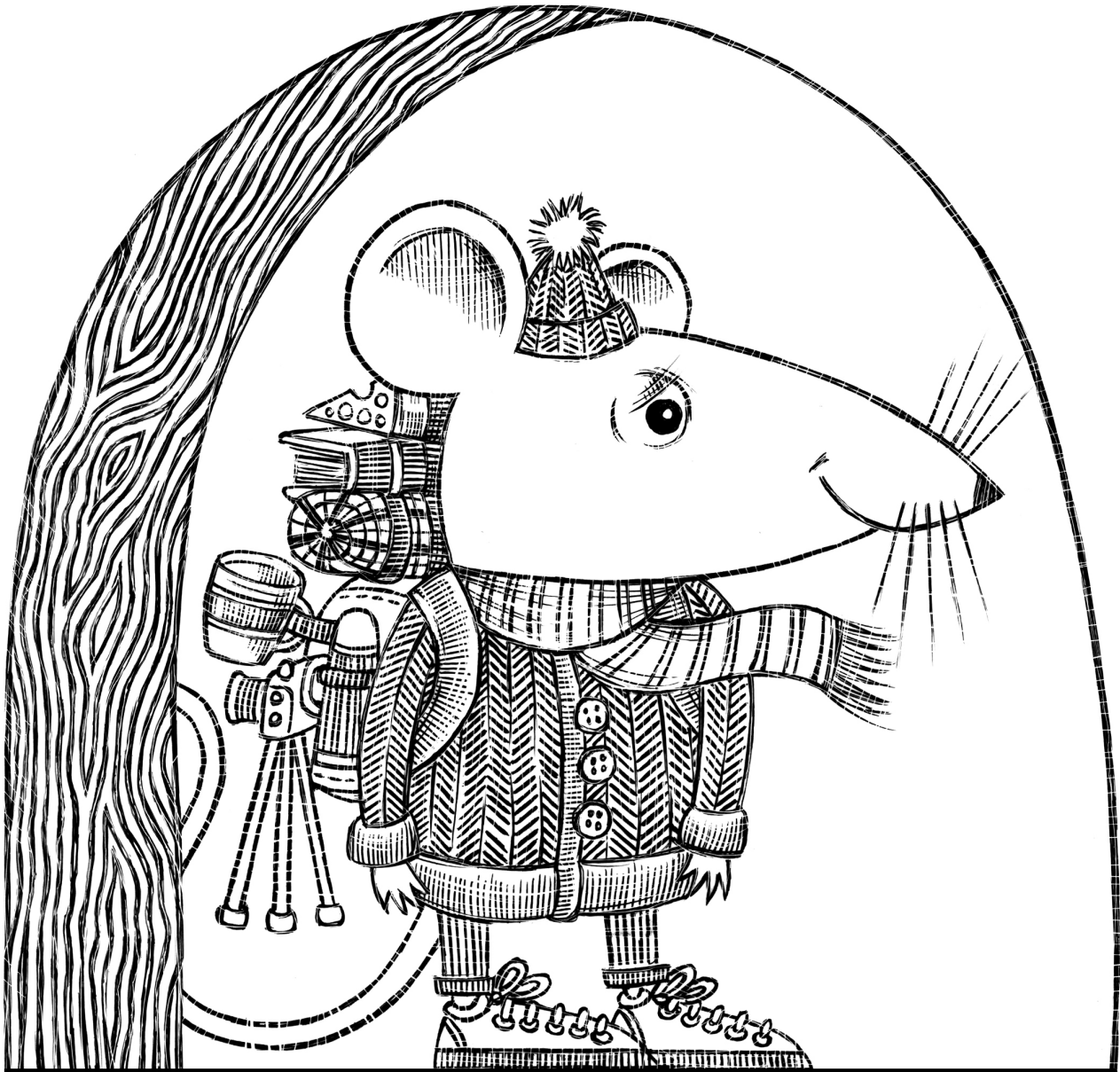
Colour this in, cut it out and blue-tac it to the wall near the floor.



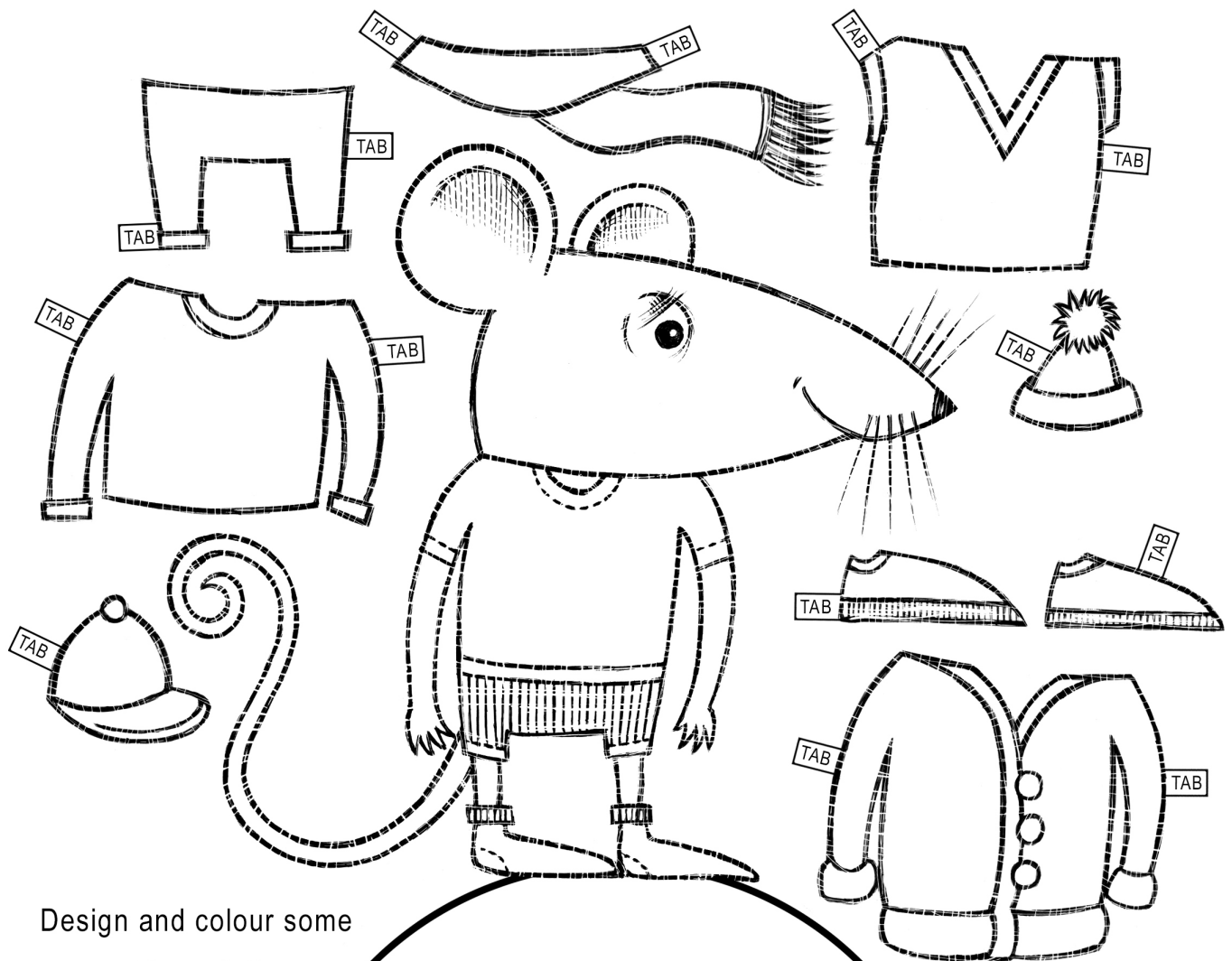
MOUSE in HOUSE

Ready to Walk Colour-In

Colour this in, cut it out and blue-tac it to the wall near the floor.



OUTDOOR MOUSE



Design and colour some
new outdoor clothes
for Mouse.

Cut around Mouse and the semi-circle stand.

An adult can help you with
the cutting and the stand.

Cut around the
clothes and shapes
and bend the tabs to join.

Only cut around semi-circle stand then insert.