



Tribb's Troubles

Trevor Cole

Reading Level: 2-3

Interest Level: Adult

Book Summary

Tribb has always been a thinker, not a doer. But he wants to do something about the mice in his house, and fast. Linda, his wife, hates those mice. If only Tribb could get rid of the nasty little things. Then Linda might treat him with some respect again. Maybe even fall in love with him again. Tribb has his troubles, all right. Mouse trouble. Marriage trouble. In the end, though, Tribb solves his problems. Or does he?

Author Biography

The Globe and Mail called Trevor Cole “one of the best young novelists in Canada.” Trevor Cole has written three bestselling novels. His most recent, *Practical Jean*, won the 2011 Leacock Medal for Humour. Trevor has also won nine National Magazine Awards for his work as a journalist.

Note to the educator: The following activities are suggestions only. Please choose and adjust the projects and questions according to the specific needs and level of your students as well as their experience with doing novel studies. Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

Book Cover and Title

1. Have students read the title and describe what they see on the front cover. Ask students to share their feelings and thoughts as they look at the cover. Ask students, “What do you think the book is about?”
2. Read the description of the book on the back cover. Ask students the following questions:

What do you learn about Tribb and Linda?

How do you think Tribb tries to get rid of the mice?

WORKING WITH THE BOOK

Characters

Tell students that readers can learn about the characters in a novel in three ways—from (1) what the writer tells us, (2) what the characters say, do, and think, and (3) what others think and say about the characters.

As students read the novel, have them note a few examples from each chapter, where applicable, of how the writer develops the character of Linda. Encourage students to make inferences about the character, where possible. After students have read the entire book, have them share their examples in small groups.

How do we make inferences?

Active readers use their experience and knowledge to make educated guesses about characters and their motives. Readers who make inferences use clues in the text together with their own experiences to help them figure out the author's meaning.

What the writer tells us about Linda

Inference

What Linda says, does, and thinks

Inference

What other characters think and say about Linda

Inference

Setting

Explain to the students that the setting provides details of when and where events take place. These details can add to the story in different ways (e.g., underline a theme or invoke thoughts and feelings.) After they have read the entire book, have students discuss the following questions:

1. Much of the action in the novel takes place in the Tribb family's kitchen and living room. What other settings are used in the novel?
2. "Tribb was starting to think the world was against him." For each of the settings listed in the chart, provide examples of how events turn against Tribb and support his belief the world was against him.

Setting	How events turn against Tribb
the kitchen	<i>Linda discovers they have mice</i>
the living room	
the hall	
the basement	
Cap and Cork Pub	
Home Depot	

3. Do you think the world could be "against" Tribb, or anyone? Give reasons for your opinion. Why do you think people sometimes blame the world when things go wrong? Give specific examples of when people might think the world was "for" them.

Plot

Explain to the students that the plot moves forward as Tribb responds to other people's words and feelings. After the students have read the entire novel, have them work in small groups to fill in the chart.

Character	What the character said How the character felt	How Tribb responds
Linda	Linda was horrified. (p. 18) "Mouse droppings are toxic... If they got into Suzy's food, I'd never forgive myself." (p. 18)	He decides to buy mousetraps.
Suzy		
Peter		
The neighbours		

Have students discuss the following questions based on the examples they included in the chart above.

1. In general, do you think Tribb paid too much attention to other people's feelings and words? Use specific examples to support your opinion.
2. Choose one of your examples and describe how you would have responded differently, and why.
3. Why do you think some people let the words and feelings of others dictate their actions? When might it be beneficial to let your actions be dictated by the feelings and words of others? When might it be not so beneficial? Give specific examples.

TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. "Tribb could tell she was not paying any attention to him." (page 8)
 - (a) Why is Linda not paying attention to Tribb at this moment? To what extent does Tribb seem to care at this point? Use details from Chapter 1 to support your opinion.
 - (b) At what point does Tribb reveal that he is concerned about his relationship with Linda? What concerns him? How does he try to explain his concern away?
 - (c) At what crucial time later in the story does Linda not pay attention to Tribb? What are the consequences of Linda's not paying attention?

2. "Tribb supposed that she kept measuring herself to see how she fit in the world. Like anyone, he thought." (page 11)
 - (a) Who is "she"? What did she keep measuring against others? Who did Tribb measure himself against? How? Why?
 - (b) Do you think most people measure themselves against others to see how they fit in? Give reasons for your answer.
 - (c) How do the ways people measure themselves against others change as they move from childhood to young adulthood to adulthood? Give specific examples.
 - (d) Do you think people ever stop measuring themselves against others? If yes, when and why? If no, why not? Think about when you were younger. How did you measure yourself against others? How do you measure yourself against others now?

3. "They worked well together on problems because they had different ways of going at them." (page 16)
 - (a) Describe how Tribb and Peter solved problems differently. Provide specific examples from the story that illustrate Tribb's and Peter's different ways of solving a problem.
 - (b) In your opinion, when is it better to be a thinker like Tribb? When is it better to be a doer like Peter? Provide specific examples.
 - (c) Are you more of a thinker or a doer? Share examples that show you are one or the other, or both.

4. "So Tribb always dreaded going over to Allison and Peter's place for dinner." (page 17)
- (a) Why does Tribb feel dread going to Allison and Peter's place?
 - (b) Do you think Linda was right in comparing Tribb to Peter? Why or why not?
 - (c) In general, what is your opinion of Linda as a wife? Give examples to support your opinion. Does your opinion of Linda change as you read the story? If yes, explain why and how. If no, explain why not.
5. "*Infested*: such an ugly word. Words like that always seemed to have a bad story behind them." (page 20)
- (a) What is Tribb's attitude toward people who have mice in their home?
 - (b) Later on in the story (page 31), Tribb describes himself as "another ordinary customer with a mouse problem." How has Tribb's attitude toward mice infestations changed? Why has his attitude changed?
 - (c) Tribb thinks *divorce* is an ugly word. What does this reveal about Tribb's attitude toward and experience with divorce? Do you think Tribb's attitude toward divorce would change if his daughter, Suzy, ever got divorced? Explain how and why.
 - (d) Look at the pairs of words and phrases below. Each pair has a similar meaning. Which word or phrase in each pair seems "ugly" to you. Explain why.

cheap; careful with money	support; handout
good with computers; nerdy	talkative; mouthy
rich business person; fat cat	old man; senior
 - (e) Why do people sometimes use words or phrases that are "ugly."
6. "He could see more than a dozen different ways to trap or kill mice." (page 21)
- (a) How does Tribb feel looking at all the mousetrap choices? Why do you think he feels so nervous about buying the right mousetrap?
 - (b) Have you ever felt confused or overwhelmed by choices in a store? Share your experience. In general, do you think stores provide too many choices? Support your opinion by naming specific items.
 - (c) Do you ever buy items and wish you had more choice? Which items? Which choices would you like to have when buying these items?

7. “ ‘You know, when you’re married,’ said Tribb, ‘you have to worry about more than yourself. You have to worry about what someone else wants, all the time.’ ” (page 49)
- (a) Do you agree with the reason that Tribb gives to explain why marriages, or any relationships, are hard? Do you think Tribb finds his marriage harder than most people in a relationship? Give reasons for your opinions.
- (b) What other responsibilities do people have to each other when in a marriage or a relationship?
- (c) What is your idea of a “perfect” relationship between couples? Do you think a perfect relationship is possible? Why or why not?
8. “ ‘I said they’re old technology,’ said Peter, and he grinned. ‘So’s peanut butter.’ ” (page 51)
- (a) What, besides peanut butter, does Peter call old technology?
- (b) What was more successful in the story—the use of old or new technology?
- (c) List the technology you use in your daily life (e.g., computers, smart phones, MP3s). Would you consider the technology you use old or new technology? Do you think technology changes too fast? Use specific examples to support your opinion.
9. “He decided to call an expert.” (page 64)
- (a) Why did Tribb finally decide to call an expert? What did he learn from the expert? Give specific details.
- (b) When is it a good idea to call an expert? When is it a good idea to try to find your own solutions to a problem? Give specific examples.
- (c) Everyone has something that they are an expert in. What was Peter an expert in? Tribb? Linda? What are you an expert in?
10. “Tribb was flying up the stairs when he heard the screams.” (page 72)
- (a) Who was screaming, and why?
- (b) What do you think happens when Tribb gets upstairs? After the women leave? Give reasons for your predictions.
- (c) Do you like how the story ended? Give reasons for your opinion.

WRITING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Choose a character or event from the novel that you connected with in some way. For example, did the character or event remind you of something in your life? Cause an emotional reaction in you? Teach you something? Describe how and why in a paragraph.

2. The women from the fundraising group have gone home and Linda has just finished cleaning up the kitchen. Tribb approaches Linda. Linda has ignored Tribb since she found the mouse in the cookie tin. Imagine the conversation Tribb and Linda might have. Write the conversation. Here is a possible start:

Tribb: Linda? Honey? Are you still mad?

3. The expert gives Tribb a lot of tips on how to get rid of mice. Choose an area that you are an expert in (e.g., getting along with people, cooking, organizing your time). Write a list of tips.
4. Linda's crystal candy dish was precious to her because it was her grandmother's. Think of an item you own that is precious to you. How did you get the item? Why is it precious? What does it look like? Do you use it or do you keep it in a safe spot? Write a paragraph about the item.
5. Imagine you are Tribb. Write a letter to Dear Abby. Explain why you think your marriage is in trouble and ask for advice.
6. Are you facing a challenge in your life? Do you want some advice? Write an email to Dear Abby at http://www.uexpress.com/dearabby/dearabby_form.html.

PROJECTS and ACTIVITIES

1. Find out How to Do Something

Tribb found out how to get rid of mice. Have students think of something they would like to find out how to do (e.g., fix a leaky tap, make the perfect pizza dough, remove coffee stains from a rug, get rid of ants). Assist the students in searching for short videos online. (YouTube is an excellent resource.)

2. Research Inventions

Peter liked to invent and build things that made life easier. Have students work in pairs to find out who invented the following items, and when:

spring-loaded mousetrap	vacuum cleaner
safety pin	Velcro
liquid whiteout	toilet paper
tin can	escalator

Encourage students to research everyday items of their choice.

3. Become a Market Researcher

Have students brainstorm items that most people buy frequently at a food store. List the students' responses on the board. Choose one of the items and have students share how they (and others) make their choice when buying this item (e.g., cost, personal likes, packaging, habit). List the students' responses on the board.

Then have the students create a consumer survey that focuses on finding out how people make consumer decisions by handing out the partial survey on the next page. Students can work in pairs or small groups to add, in the top row, five common items that people often buy and, in the first column, three additional ways people make consumer choices. Explain to the students, if necessary, the purpose of the "Other" box.

Encourage students to survey five people they know at home, at work, and in the community. The students should ask each person, "How do you decide which tea / bread / etc. to buy?" and then put a tick in the appropriate box. Have students compare their results.

Students can practise giving the survey by surveying a classmate as their first respondent.

Survey

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Cost					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5. Other					

4. Create an On-screen Joke Book

Tribb had a couple of favourite jokes that included his name, Munday. Have students tell their favourite jokes, riddles, or funny stories. Then have the students put them in writing in a Word document. Assist students with finding and placing an online image that illustrates their writing. Combine all the jokes, riddles, and funny stories into one document that the students can access. If the students use email, have them send the on-screen joke book to their friends.

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