

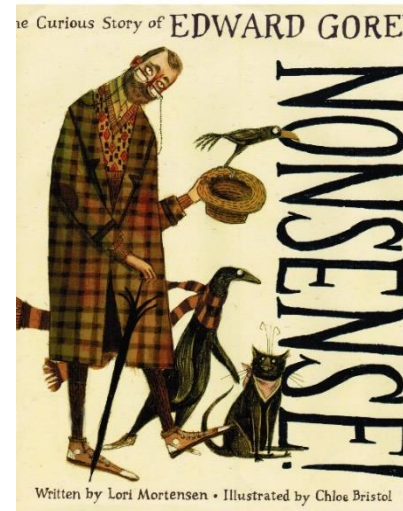
# Teacher's Guide

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## Nonsense! The Curious Story of Edward Gorey

Written by Lori Mortensen,  
Illustrated by Chloe Bristol

**Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020**  
Picture Book Biography  
Hardcover, 40 pages, Preschool-3  
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### ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1925, a boy was born in Chicago who loved words and pictures. A brilliant boy. An only boy. A dandy boy who looked out his window, drew sausage-shaped pictures of city-bound trains and taught himself to read. Then one day, the five-year old read whimsical *Alice in Wonderland* and dark and disturbing *Dracula*, one right after the other. It was a stunning combination that captured his imagination. His name was Edward Gorey. Years later, Gorey would take these sweet and sinister images and mix them up with his own brand of nonsense served in a sea of sketchy black lines that would enthrall, puzzle and anger people all over the world. Why would anyone write stories like *that*? Why do his stories have so many unfortunate endings? What did his stories mean, anyway?

### THEMES

Biographies | Writing | Illustrating  
Character education: patience, persistence, determination, imagination, breaking barriers

### CHARACTER EDUCATION

- Gorey was talented at an early age. Have students discuss the qualities that helped him achieve success.
- Gorey didn't mind being different. Have students discuss how this made a difference.
- Have students compare and contrast the character qualities found in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Dracula*.

### HISTORY

- Gorey isn't the only author/illustrator who has broken barriers with their own style. Have students explore and discuss others such as Maurice Sendak, Dr. Seuss, Roald Dahl, and Beatrix Potter.
- Gorey's style has influenced many well-known people today. Have students identify them and discuss how their styles are similar to Gorey's.
- Gorey admired the contrasting qualities of *Dracula* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Have students explore these authors and the story behind their unique styles.

## SOCIAL STUDIES

- Gorey grew up in a society with certain expectations. What were these expectations? How did Gorey live his life differently?
- Many of Gorey's stories have odd or unfortunate endings. Invite students to discuss why his stories created controversy.

## LANGUAGE ARTS

- Many of Gorey's stories included odd characters or objects such as penguins, hats, scarves, bicycles, and umbrellas. Invite students to write a story with a character and two odd objects.
- Gorey enjoyed making up anagrams using the letters in his name, Edward Gorey. Invite students to invent new names based on the letters of their name.
- Gorey especially liked cats. Invite students to write their own cat stories.
- Gorey liked the contrasting styles of *Dracula* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Invite students to choose two contrasting books and write their own story that combines those styles.
- Show students one of Gorey's illustrations then have them write their own story to accompany it.

## ART

- Gorey often used sketchy black lines to draw. Invite students to draw a picture of their pet or other animal with sketchy black lines.
- Gorey lived with six cats. Invite students to draw Gorey's cats.
- Gorey created his own style of drawing. Invite students to create a unique style of drawing.

## RESEARCH

- In 1979, Gorey bought a 200-year-old house he called the Elephant House. Invite students to learn more about this former sea captain's home in Cape Cod.
- Daniel Handler, Tim Burton and Neil Gaiman were all influenced by the work of Edward Gorey. Invite students to research how Gorey's style influenced their work.
- There are many author/illustrators with their own unique style. Invite students to research who these might be and how their work is different than the rest.

## FUN EDWARD GOREY FACTS

- Gorey kept vast collections of things at the Elephant House including doorknobs, potato mashers, cheese graters, and 25,000 books.
- Gorey enjoyed watching ballet nearly as much as he enjoyed writing and illustrating. He attended every performance of the New York City Ballet for 23 seasons.
- Gorey was easily recognizable in his long fur coats, sneakers, heavy jewelry and metal rings.
- Gorey designed a production of *Dracula* on Broadway in 1977. "Edward Gorey's *Dracula*" won two Tony Awards for Best Revival and Best Costumes.
- Gorey earned many colorful descriptions over the years including "buccaneer" "bongo-drumming beatnik" "full-blown eccentric" and "immigrant from another century."

## HOLIDAYS AND OBSERVANCES

### January

10—Peculiar People Day

13—Make Your Dream Come True Day

20—Penguin Awareness Day  
24—Belly Laugh Day

### February

10—Umbrella Day  
13—Get a Different Name Day

### March

31—National Crayon Day

### April

National Humor Month  
Week 1, Library Week  
2—Children's Book Day  
6—Plan Your Epitaph Day  
8—Draw a Picture of a Bird Day  
9—Name Yourself Day  
23—Take a Chance Day  
25—World Penguin Day  
27—Tell a Story Day

### June

1—Dare Day  
8—Name Your Poison Day  
10—Ball Point Pen Day

### August

9—Book Lover's Day

### September

6—Read a Book Day  
22—Elephant Appreciation Day

### October

6—Mad Hatter Day

### November

2—Book Lover's Day  
2—Plan Your Epitaph Day  
12—Young Readers Day  
20—Absurdity Day

### December

31—Unlucky Day

## REVIEWS

"A stellar biography as creepy and fun as its subject." –**Starred Kirkus Review**

"This playful picture book biography is a wonderful and unique introduction to Edward Gorey's life and work." –**Starred School Library Journal Review**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lori Mortensen is an award-winning children's book author of more than 100 books and over 500 stories and articles. Recent titles include, *Nonsense! The Curious Story of Edward Gorey*, *Away with Words*, *the Daring Story of Isabella Bird*, *If Wendell Had a Walrus*, *Chicken Lily*, *Mousequerade Ball*, and *Cowpoke Clyde Rides the Range*, a sequel to *Cowpoke Clyde & Dirty Dawg*, one of Amazon's best picture books of 2013. When she's not letting her cat in, or out, she's tapping away at her computer, conjuring, coaxing, and prodding her latest stories to life. For more information about her books, events, upcoming releases, teacher activities, and critique service, visit her website

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

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

A lifelong fan of Edward Gorey, Chloe Bristol was born and raised in Texas and now lives in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Chloe is a graduate of ArtCenter College of Design, and she now works as an animator and illustrator for companies such as Disney, Paramount Pictures, and Cartoon Network. This is her first picture book.

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