

## ABOUT

### *the Author*

**M**ARK BARRATT was born in London, where he now lives with his wife and children. He has been an actor, director, writer, and teacher. His script for the audio play *The Wizard's Spell* won a prize for Best Entertainment at the New York Festival in 1994.

## PRAISE FOR

### *Joe Rat*

“Gritty, flawed characters, propulsive plot, and brooding atmosphere yield a gripping mash-up of Dickensian tropes with an Adam Rapp-like concern for throwaway children. A chilling mystery that will haunt readers long after the final page.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“A pugnacious orphan scavenging the London underworld to pay off his nefarious benefactor — it sounds like the missing YA novel of Charles Dickens or Wilkie Collins because, basically, it is.”

— *Booklist*

Read about more of  
Joe Rat's adventures in  
**THE WILD MAN.**

## JOE RAT

Written by Mark Barratt

Paperback ISBN: 978-0-8028-5356-1 ❖ \$9.00  
5" x 7" ❖ 320 pages ❖ Ages 11 & up

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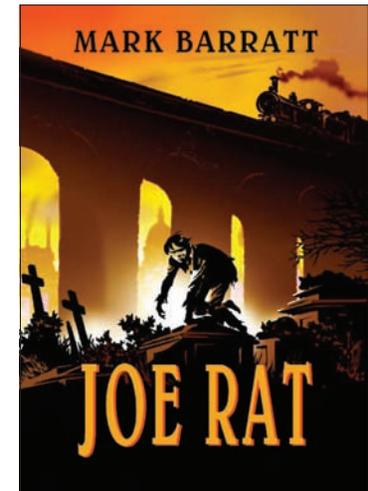
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## JOE RAT

Written by  
Mark Barratt



*Darker than the dirt of the street, a creature emerged, dripping. Crouched, cowering on all fours, its head swayed this way and that, checking up and down the street. It could have been a dog. It was too big for a cat. Then, as the creature straightened up, the whites of its eyes caught the light. It was a boy.*

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

- ❖ 19th-century London
- ❖ The Industrial Revolution
- ❖ Orphans and neglected children
- ❖ Trust and loyalty
- ❖ Appearance vs. reality

## **THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE READING THE BOOK**

1. Have you ever been mistreated by someone and unable to stand up for yourself? If so, how did you respond? How would you advise a friend who is in a similar situation?
2. Do you have something special that you keep hidden or secret from everyone else? What meaning does this item have for you?
3. Using library or online resources, read about orphans and homeless children living in 19th-century London. Why were so many young people living on the streets without families or homes?
4. Have you ever been disappointed in a parent or an adult whom you looked up to? Do you feel that this disappointment changed how you think about that person or yourself?



## **QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON AFTER READING THE BOOK**

1. How do the young people living on the streets in the novel obtain their food and shelter? Think of the various people Joe knows and list the ways they make their living.
2. Joe regularly gets called a “filthy tosher,” yet only feels insulted when he is called a “mudlark” by Billie and his gang. What is the social ranking among the urban poor and between classes in this book, as you can discern from people’s treatment and opinions of one another? Is there a similar social hierarchy, or pecking order, in

your school or community? What are the reasons for power and powerlessness?

3. The title of chapter 4, “Mothers,” suggests a parallel between the character Joe calls “Mother” and Bess’s mother. How are these two “mothers” alike?
4. Are any adults trustworthy in this story? Why or why not?
5. At the end of chapter 13, Joe decides that he will never return to Mother again. What has changed?
6. Things are not always what they seem in this story. How does Joe’s view of Jack, Bess, the Madman, and the Watchman change during the course of the book? What happens to change his opinion of each of them?
7. The book ends with the image of the white tip of the dog’s tail among the weeds. Is this image promising or foreboding? How do you know?
8. Poundfield uses the phrase “blood in and sweetness out” to describe the operation of the sugar refinery he owned, but it also has broader significance. Explain how this phrase serves as a metaphor for the relationship between industrialization and childhood in the 19th century.



## **ACTIVITIES**

1. Research the lives of young people in Victorian London. Who went to school? Who worked? What were some of the jobs children held? What kind of housing did they live in? In

small groups, discuss the differences between young people’s lives then and now. When did schooling and child labor change? Make a poster or webpage showing these changes with images and text.

2. The dire circumstances in the lives of young people like Joe were connected to a larger social and economic upheaval occurring in London and similar cities as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Explore the impact of industrialization in England by making a chart that outlines changes from 1800 to 1900 in farming, manufacturing, and transportation, and the resulting shifts in population.

3. In London during the 19th century, there were several outbreaks of cholera, the illness that Poundfield’s family died of in the novel. Investigate the causes of cholera and the conditions in London that contributed to these outbreaks. Are there places in the world where cholera is still a significant threat? Mark them on a map, or make a timeline from 1800 to the present showing where and when cholera epidemics have occurred.

4. What would the life of someone in Joe’s or Bess’s circumstances look like in the 21st century? Choose a scene from the novel to rewrite in a contemporary context.