About the Book

Leroy Ninker is a small man with a big dream: he wants to be a cowboy. But for now he’s just a thief. In fact, Leroy is robbing the Watsons’ kitchen right this minute! As he drags the toaster across the counter—screeeeech—and drops it into his bag—clannnggg—little does he know that a certain large pig who loves toast with a great deal of butter is stirring from sleep. Soon a comedy of errors (not to mention the buttery sweets in his pocket) will lead this little man on the wild and raucous rodeo ride he’s always dreamed of!
For Discussion

Have students discuss the following questions in pairs, then gather as a class and have a discussion. Focus on the different ideas that are brought up.

When Baby tells Eugenia that she hears a “Yippie-i-oh” sound outside, Eugenia asks if she had been eating pie before bed again (page 34). Why would Eugenia ask such a question? Do you believe that eating before bed will give you nightmares? Why or why not?

Firemen Ned and Lorenzo comment that their job is an interesting one (page 55). What events occurred that would make them say that?

Everyone except Mercy is quoted in the newspaper regarding Mercy's capture of the thief (pages 67–69). Pretend you are Mercy. What would you say?

Do You Hear Something? Give Me a Clue

“Sreeeeeeeetch, went the toaster. . . . Clammmmmmng, went the toaster” (page 7). The toaster makes noise—a sound Mercy clearly recognizes—when Leroy moves it.

Conduct a lesson on adjectives and onomatopoeia (a word that imitates the sound associated with it). Then pair students up and have them make a list of six things and corresponding adjectives and/or sounds that are clues to what each thing is. Collect the lists and clues, then read the clues aloud and see if classmates can figure out what the things are.

Use this activity as a prelude to a descriptive writing exercise. Ask students to write about a time they heard something and figured out what was happening based only on what they heard.

Help Is on the Way

The fire and police departments are involved in many of the Mercy Watson books. Here are a few safety-awareness activities you can use with the Mercy books:

Ask students how they would call the police or fire department in an emergency.

Discuss when to call and when not to call the fire or police departments. Which instances in the Mercy Watson books were appropriate times to call, and which were not?

Invite a local firefighter or police officer to come to the classroom and speak to the children about the role of their department in the community.

As a homework assignment, have students complete an “In Case of an Emergency” form. Information should include address, phone number, emergency contact, and so on.
**Extra! Read All About It!**

Mercy’s capture of Leroy Ninker makes the front page of the morning newspaper. Various neighbors and witnesses are quoted in the newspaper article. Hold a class discussion about the elements of journalism and how it differs from fiction. If possible, read aloud some simple news-related stories (classroom newspapers can be a good source). Have students practice becoming journalists by writing their own version of “Pet Pig Captures Thief.”

**A Pig by Any Other Name**

Mercy gets hailed as a porcine wonder. Ask students if they know what *porcine* means. Explain that it is another word for piglike. Have students define the following terms related to the porcine wonder: *swine, hog, boar, sow, gilt, piglets*. Children can use any reference material they choose (such as a dictionary or library books). Move the discussion to parts of speech, in particular nouns and verbs. Note that *sow* as a noun refers to a pig, but *sow* as a verb means “to plant.” Ask students to cite a similar example from *Mercy Watson Fights Crime* (such as toast). Challenge students to find further examples in their reading. As an extension, introduce homophones, words that sound the same but are spelled differently.

**A Cowboy’s Dream**

Leroy Ninker is described as “a small man with a big dream” (page 4). He dreams of becoming a cowboy. Ask students about their dreams. What would they like to become? Whom do they idolize, and what steps might they need to take to fulfill their dream?