



AMERICAN LION

Reading Guide

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Preliminary Remarks

- The following assignments offer tasks and activities from which the teacher or students can choose.
- Many tasks are suitable for talks or presentations to the class.
- Some tasks overlap with others.
- The material can be edited and students may copy instructions, questions, and answers into their exercise books.

Notes from the Author

I have been a teacher for more than half my life, but I did not earn good grades when I was in public school. I worked almost full time beginning when I was 12 and ... I liked to have fun. There was not much time left for school. Fortunately, I liked to read. So, I read my schoolbooks. And every night, I would fall asleep with a Leon Uris, James Michener, or Jack London book on my chest. You should know that many of the books I read in junior high or high school were "too hard for me." I finished them because they excited me and helped me understand people and the world beyond my town. Years ago, a magazine advertisement made me proud that I read books that were not required by my teachers. It pictured an IBM executive in a suit, white shirt, and tie looking across his desk, saying, "Send me a man who reads!"

I am sure I was an average reader, but my point is, I read a lot. Reading a lot made me a better reader, even when the things I read were too "hard" for me.

I think I learned to read like a writer. I noticed spelling and punctuation. And I found myself saying, "I wish I had written that sentence, just like that."

Now, I try to write like a reader.

About the Author

Professor Tim Rush teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in literacy education, humanities education, and linguistics at the University of Wyoming. Working closely with the tribes of the Wind River Indian Reservation, he has helped develop UW programs for certifying teachers of American Indian children. He was awarded the University of Wyoming Outreach School's *Holon Family Award* and was recognized by the International Reading Association with its Jerry Johns Outstanding Teacher Educator in Reading award. Grandfather of a girls' volleyball champion and two young men serving in the US Air Force, Tim Rush lives on the high plains west of Laramie, Wyoming, with Alice, his wife of 50 years, and an array of horses, dogs, cats and regular guests from the wild kingdom.

Notes to Readers

- My 50 years of teaching reading have shown me that students are always better readers than they think they are, especially when they are interested in what they are reading.
- All my life, I have been a storyteller. When I tell a story, I do different things with my voice to give my listeners the feeling that they are in the story. I try to do the same sort of thing when I write.
- My life as a writer has taught me to trust my readers to fill in the details in stories and poems. One of the reasons you might feel like you are in the chapters of American Lion is that you get just enough information to connect the story to places, people, experiences, and feelings that you might recognize. Your imagination does the rest!

Notes to Teachers

- The tasks that follow may be used to build or reinforce vocabulary and increase comprehension. Remember that American Lion was written to stimulate the joy of reading. New readers have the opportunity to emotionally connect to the text while reading on their own.
- Reading is language and your readers can be engaged with the text through discussion, group presentations, and writing extensions on the events described in the book. For example, "What happened to momma lion when she was separated from her cubs?" "Write the reactions of family and neighbors when they heard what Yuma did to save Riann in the arroyo that

night." "What makes a hero? Tell a friend about a hero you know." "What if a 'nose' was missing at the end of 'Counting Noses'?"

- You may encourage students to copy instructions, questions, and answers into their writing journals.

Pre-Reading Activity

COVER:

In a sentence or two, tell what the cover suggested American Lion was all about. Did you know what the animal was?

Activities While Reading

FIRST PAGES:

"I am a solitary hunter ... " Could you tell, right away, who was talking? What were some clues?

Did you know right away that this book was going to be supportive of mountain lions? Give two or three reasons why.

INTRODUCTION:

Did this chapter make you want to read on? Why? What did the author do to hook you into the story?

At the end of the chapter how did you feel? Why?

PREDATOR AND PREY:

How does this chapter remind you that families and parents are important, even to wild animals?

A writer tries to leave details to the reader. How would you say this worked in the story? What images came to mind when you read about the battle between the lion and the coyote? Would it have been more clear to describe every detail? Why or why not?

CHARLIE JANSEN'S BARN CAT:

There is a lot of talk in this story. Was the dialogue ever hard to understand? How and why?

The ending lets you make your own mind up about Lizbeth. If you were asked, how would you write the ending?

JAKE AND DUKE:

Tell me about the characters. Did they seem realistic? How come?

How did the descriptions of the story setting make you feel you were with Jake and Duke?

RYAN, RIANN AND THE GUARDIAN MARE:

This is a book about mountain lions. Who was the main character in this chapter?

Where and when does the story happen?

Were you afraid for the characters in this chapter? Find a phrase or sentence that made you fear for Riann, Yuma, and the young lion.

FORT WASHAKIE SCHOOL PLAYGROUND:

Did the description of the school seem familiar? What was like your school, and what was different?

Think about the lion picture on the cover and the description of the old lion in the playground tree. Do they seem threatening? Say why or why not.

COUNTING NOSES:

I think that sentences in stories and poems can be word pictures. Were there any word-picture sentences in this story that you remember? Find and read one you like to somebody. Ask that person to do the same.

GETTING ALONG:

This chapter closes the circle on American Lion. Did it surprise you that the ranchers had decided to live with the cougars? Would you have done the same? Can you say why or why not?

Post-Reading Activities

TELL AND SHOW:

For this chapter sit with a friend and the book. Now, tell the story of your favorite chapter in your own words. Point to sentences in the book that are connected to your summary. Then switch places and give your friend a chance to do the same. If you are on your own, you can make this a writing exercise.

CONCLUSION:

Now that you have finished American Lion, how do you feel about mountain lions? Is it different than before you read the book?