

Old Yeller



By

Fred Gipson

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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Table of Contents

Suggestions and Expectations	3
List of Skills	4
Synopsis / Author Biography	5
Student Checklist	6
Reproducible Student Booklet	7
Answer Key	70

About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This 73 page curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one or two chapters of *Old Yeller* and is comprised of four activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language and Extension Activities

A portfolio cover (Page 7) as well as a Checklist (Page 6) are included so that students may track their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to.

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure.
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include pioneer life, farming and agriculture, courage and sacrifice, family, perseverance, overcoming difficulty.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying / creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Working with anagrams.
8. Use of singular / plural nouns
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *similes*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify the climax of the novel.
4. Five W's Chart

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Protagonists
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Comparing two Characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Chart
5. Conduct an interview
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete a KWS Chart

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Design an Information Card

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Synopsis

The stray dog was ugly, and a thieving rascal, too. But he sure was clever, and a smart dog could be a big help on the wild Texas frontier, especially with Papa away on a long cattle drive up to Abilene.

Strong and courageous, Old Yeller proved that he could protect Travis's family from any sort of danger. But can Travis do the same for Old Yeller? [The Publisher]

Author Biography

Fred Gipson

Frederick Benjamin "Fred" Gipson (February 7, 1908 – August 14, 1973) was an American author. He is best known for writing the 1956 novel *Old Yeller*, which became a popular 1957 Walt Disney film. Gipson was born on a farm near Mason in the Texas Hill Country, the son of Beck Gipson and Emma Deishler. After working at a variety of farming and ranching jobs, he enrolled in 1933 at the University of Texas at Austin. There he wrote for the *Daily Texan* and *The Ranger*, but he left school before graduating to become a newspaper journalist.



In the 1940s, Gipson began writing short stories with a western theme which proved to be prototypes for his longer works of fiction that followed. In 1946, his first full-length book, *The Fabulous Empire: Colonel Zack Miller's Story*, was published. *Hound-Dog Man* in 1947 established Gipson's reputation when it became a Doubleday Book-of-the-Month Club selection and sold over 250,000 copies in its first year of publication and later made into a film in 1959. His additional works included *The Home Place* (later filmed as *Return of the Texan*, a 1962 Western starring Dale Robertson and Joanne Dru), *Big Bend: A Homesteader's Story*, *Cowhand: The Story of a Working Cowboy*, *The Trail-Driving Rooster* and *Recollection Creek*.

Courtesy of Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Gipson

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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

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Name: _____

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By Fred Gipson

Chapter 1



Before you read the chapter:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. One of the main protagonists of *Old Yeller* is a very likeable fourteen-year-old boy, Travis. Think back on some of your favorite characters from past novels you have read or movies you’ve seen. What do you think makes for an especially interesting protagonist?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

scabbard	fertile	cattle	depredations
sulk	notion	trifle	hesitate

1. The boys were told not to _____ with Mr. Peterson because he had a bad temper.
2. Farmer McGinn’s wheat fields were very _____.
3. When her mother sent Sandi to her room, she sat on her bed and began to _____.
4. If you _____ before passing the puck, your chances of success are not good.
5. Dad climbed onto the saddle and then tied his bedroll to the back of the _____.
6. Travis’s father replaced the rifle in his _____.
7. The _____ of the gang of outlaws kept all of the townspeople living in fear.
8. The dictator’s _____ of what is fair and honest is quite peculiar.

Questions



1. How did Old Yeller's name have a double meaning?

2. Describe the setting of Chapter One.

3. **Foreshadowing** is a literary device in which the author provides a hint of things to come in the novel. Find an example of foreshadowing in the first two paragraphs of Chapter One.

4. Why were Travis's dad and the other men leaving for Abilene, Kansas?

5. Abilene was _____ miles north from where they lived.

6. From what you know of Arliss so far, how would you describe his personality? Why?

7. Travis's dad promised him a _____ if he acted a man's part while his dad was gone.

8. Describe how Bell was killed.

9. Describe the strategy that Travis used to get Jumper to obey him.

10. Travis's mother demonstrates in two ways in this chapter that she respects his new position in the family. Describe one way in which she showed this.

Language Activities



A. What's that you say?

The characters in *Old Yeller* use some very unique expressions. Put each of the following expressions in your own words (you may have to check the context to be sure):

<i>he skinned out</i>	
<i>I wasn't to be trifled with</i>	
<i>Having a tight tail-holt on the world</i>	
<i>I nearly dropped him in his tracks</i>	

B. Alliteration

Authors often enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. An example from Chapter One is “. . . he was howling his head off...”



Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

The baying of a hound dog	
The <i>peep</i> of a cardinal	
From your imagination	

C. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **PAN** can also form the word **NAP**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



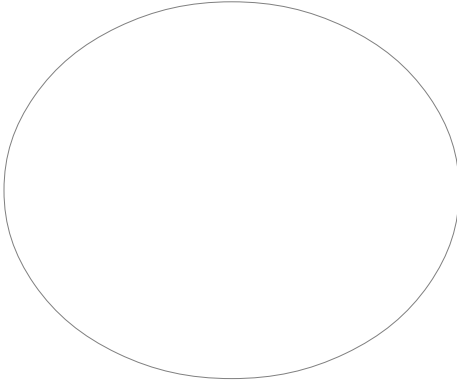
- read the clue in the right-hand column.
- Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters.

Each of the words in the left-hand column are found in the first chapter of our novel.

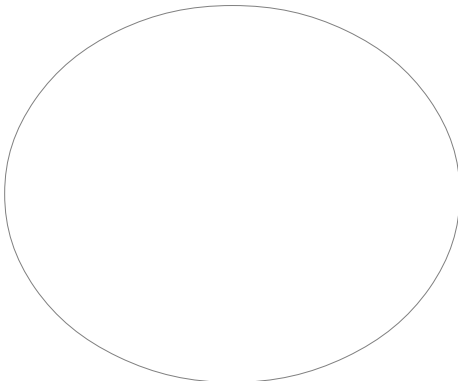
Word	Anagram	Clue
bread		Removed clothing.
drive		Deep-sea ____.
worse		Cursed.
horse		Seaside.
bears		Sword.
support		Daze.

D. 5 Ws and an H.

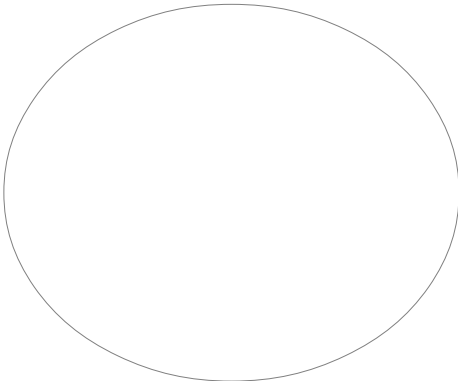
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



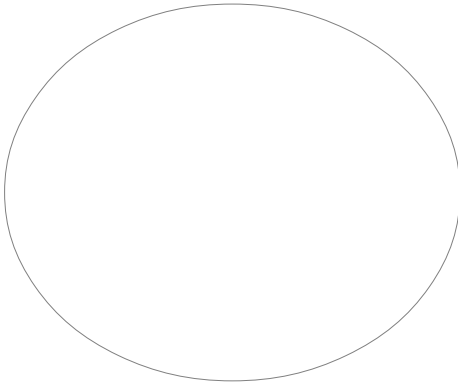
WHO?



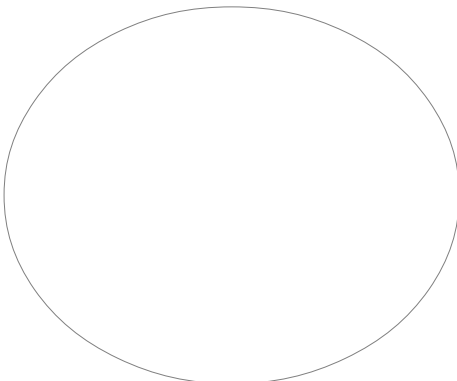
WHAT?



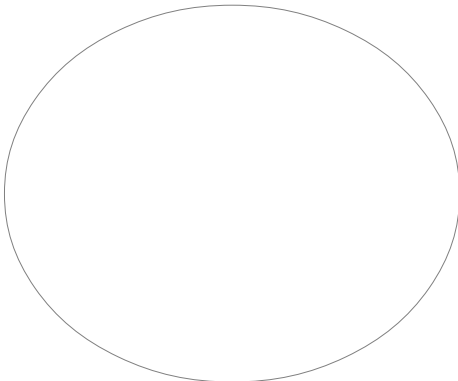
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

Extension Activities



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel.



Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first chapter of *Old Yeller*. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6