

The Incredible Journey Study Guide

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Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Create an Information Card
4. Design a cover for the novel
5. Create a comic strip
6. Design a wanted poster

Synopsis

Three beloved pets – Luath, a young Labrador retriever; Tao, a Siamese cat; and Bodger, an old bull terrier – have been separated from their family. Luath makes the decision to head for home, setting out with his companions on an incredible journey through the wilderness of northwestern Ontario. They do not know the dangers they will face. They do not know that winter is approaching, or that home is four hundred kilometers away. They will be separated by a rushing river and attacked by wild animals. They will face injury, starvation, cold and sheer exhaustion. Individually, they would never survive. But together, can they find their way home?

Plot

The animals' owners, the Hunters, leave to go to England for several months because Jim, the father, is scheduled to give a series of university lectures there. They leave their pets in the care of John Longridge, a family friend and godfather of their daughter, Elizabeth. One day, after John Longridge leaves for a two-week duck hunting trip, the animals, feeling the lack of their human helpers, set out to try to find their owners, the Hunters. Mrs. Oakes, who is taking care of Longridge's home, does not find the animals and thinks that John must have taken them with him. The animals follow their instincts and head west, towards home, 300 miles away through the Canadian wilderness. They face many obstacles in their path; from rivers to irritable people, but nonetheless, they struggle bravely on, until they finally reach home.

Characters

Luath: Luath is a young Labrador Retriever. His fur is golden red, his eyes are brown, and he is strongly built. Of the Hunters' three pets, he is the most recent addition. He is also the most determined to push forward and reach home and the Hunters. Luath usually walks on Bodger's left side.

Bodger: Bodger (whose full name is Champion Borough castle Brigadier of Doune) is an old English Bull Terrier. His fur is white with a slight pinkish tint. Bodger's left eye is nearly blind. The dog was born to fight and endure (as he does in the book). Because he is eleven years old, Bodger tires easily; but he is a brave, loyal, persevering, and tenacious companion. He is very fond of humans, particularly children, and whenever the group comes across humans in their travels, he tries to charm them for affection and snacks, with varying results. He has an intense hostility towards all cats save Tao, who earned his respect by standing up to him when Tao first joined the Hunter family as a small kitten. Though they care deeply for Luath, Bodger and Tao have a special bond. Bodger is the first of the animals to have joined the Hunter family. Despite his advanced age and diminished senses, Bodger is still every bit the fighter he was in his prime, at one point saving Luath from a Border Collie sicced on them by an irate farmer.

Tao: Tao is a slender, seal-point, old-style Siamese cat with sapphire eyes. Tao has a royal white body with dark black features such as his face, feet, and tail. An element of humor in the book is that Tao, like Bodger, despises other cats, and the two once shared many adventures terrorizing the other felines in their neighborhood; when they encounter other domesticated cats in their travels, Tao often fights them, successfully. Tao is able to open most doors, a help to the dogs in several situations. Tao is a tireless, bold, and loyal animal. Tao is probably the best equipped of the three to survive in the wilderness, and has no difficulty surviving on his own when separated from the two dogs; despite this, he spends all his time seeking to rejoin them, a testament to the bond between the animals. The cat is an independent and natural hunter, catching small birds for the group. When Tao is separated from them, the dogs fare more poorly without Tao than Tao does without them. Therefore, Tao is crucial to the dogs' survival.

John Longridge: John Longridge is Elizabeth Hunter's godfather. He lives in a stone house in a small village about 300 miles from the college town where the Hunters live. Mr. Longridge wrote several historical books, is a writer by profession, and a bachelor.

The Hunter Family: The Hunter Family consists of the father Jim, the mother and their two children, 11-year-old Peter and nine-year-old Elizabeth. Jim owns Luath, Elizabeth owns Tao, and Peter owns Bodger.

Mrs. Oakes: Mrs. Oakes is the owner of the three animals while John is gone on his trip.

The Nurmi Family: The Nurmi family is a family of Finnish immigrants. Ten-year-old Helvi discovers Tao unconscious in the river by her house, after he had been swept up by flotsam from a broken beaver dam while trying to swim across with the dogs upstream. Her family nurses him back to health, and he stays with them a few days before moving on.

The Mackenzies: James and Nell Mackenzie are elderly farmers who live alone, now that their eight children have grown, and they are instrumental in helping the dogs to survive. Bodger charms his way into their home and their pantry, and Luath appears soon afterward, his instincts leading him to fetch for James while he is duck hunting. James removes porcupine quills from Luath's muzzle, allowing the dog to recover and continue his journey. Tao is present at the farm while his companions rest and recover, and instrumental in freeing the dogs from the barn, but he is unseen by the Mackenzies.

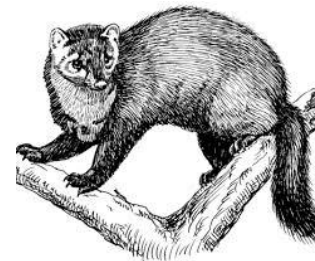
The Lynx: The Lynx tried to attack and eat Tao, but a hunter killed him, without realizing Tao was in a rabbits' den the Lynx was digging into.

Farm Dog: The Farm Dog was a vicious and mean sheepdog who attacked Luath, but Bodger intervened and fended him off.

Bear cub: The Bear cub thought Bodger was a toy and pawed at him with his sharp claws until Tao intervened and tried to protect him.

Mother Bear: The Mother Bear tried to protect her cub when Tao attacked him until she was chased off by Luath.

The Fisher: an type of wild cat that looks a bit like an otter



Author Biography

Sheila Burnford

Sheila Burnford (1918-1984) was born in Scotland and brought up in various parts of the United Kingdom. She was a volunteer ambulance driver during World War II and emigrated to Canada in 1951 with her husband and children. They settled in Port Arthur, now Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Though Sheila Burnford wrote fiction and non-fiction books for both children and adults, *The Incredible Journey* is her most well-known work. It was published in 1961, and won the 1963 *CLA Book of the Year for Children Award*. Basing the three animal characters on family pets, she created a Canadian classic. (The Publisher)



The Incredible Journey

Chapter 1 Before you read the chapter:

Our novel tells the tale of a most amazing trip taken by three pets – a cat and two dogs. Describe briefly the most incredible trip you have ever taken (or would like to take).

Chapter 1 Questions

1. What is the **setting** for Chapter One?
2. Name some of the wild animals in the Canadian wilderness.
3. How did people in these remote regions earn a living?
4. Who is John Longridge? What is his occupation?
5. Who looked after the more practical needs of John Longridge?
6. Who really owns the pets?

7. Why are the pets with John?
8. From what you know of the three pets so far, which one would you prefer to have as your own pet – and why?
9. What was the reason behind John Longridge's departure?
10. How did he let Mrs. Oakes know of his plans?
11. Describe how the young Labrador retriever took to his new home and master?

Good to Know

The setting of the novel is in the beautiful province of **Ontario**, Canada. Ontario is in the center of Canada and is over one million square kilometers (415,000 sq. miles) in area and has a population of more than 14 million people. Northwestern Ontario, where the novel take place, represents about one-half the area of the province.



Chapter 2

1. What did the three animals do after John left, and before Mrs. Oakes arrived?
2. What did Mrs. Oakes think happened to the animals?
3. Explain how the young dog took on the leadership and protection of the other two.

Inquiry learning chart

A number of animals native to the wilds of northwestern Ontario are mentioned in Chapter One. These include: **wild ducks, moose, deer, lynx, brown and black bear, fox, beaver, muskrat, otter, fishers, mink, and marten.**



1. Choose one of these animals. Draw up a chart like the one below, and in each of the columns add helpful details which would assist someone who is researching your chosen topic.

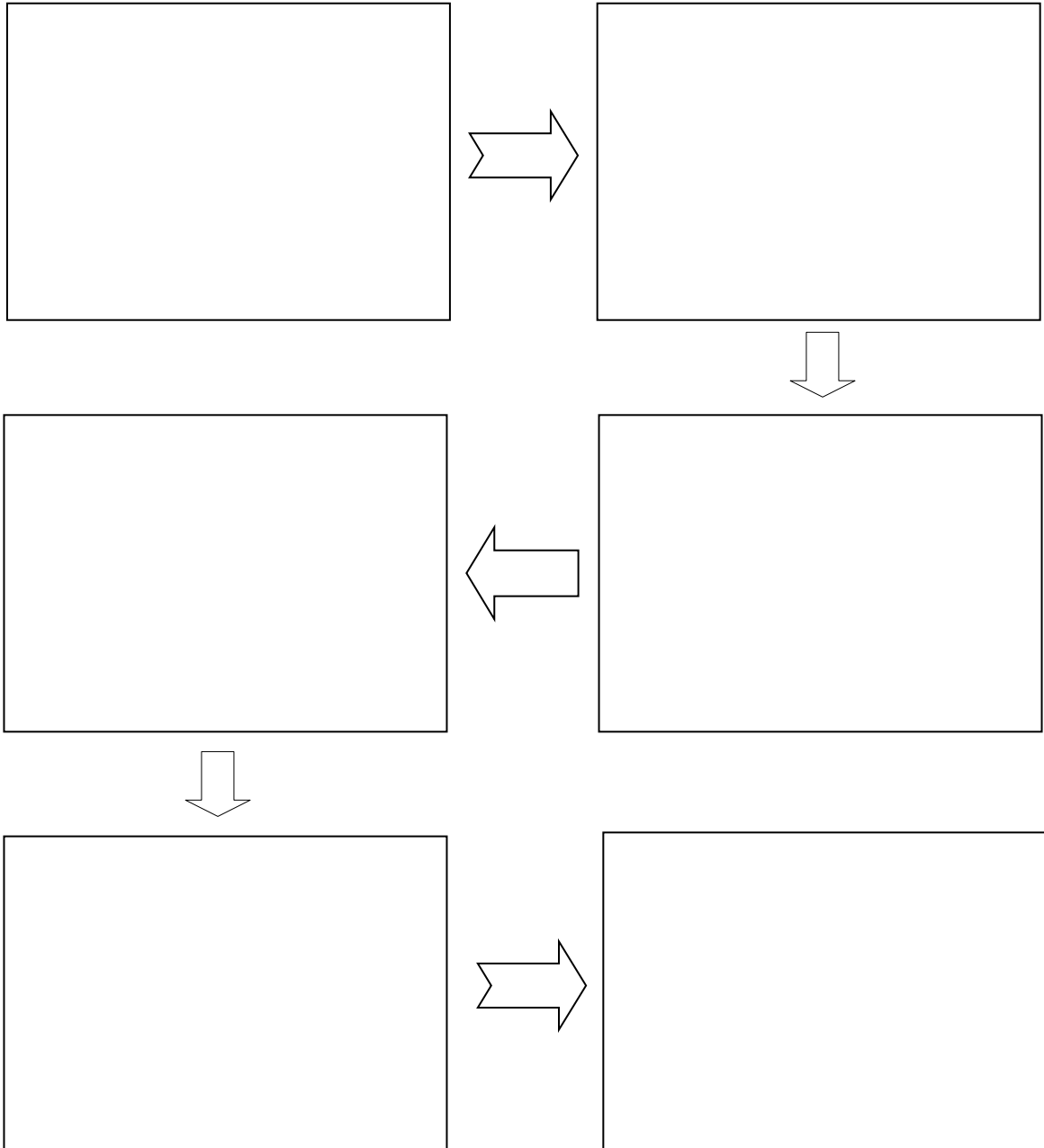
Animal		
What I already know	What I want to learn	Where to find the information

2. Now write a report yourself on one chosen animal.
3. Use an atlas to draw a map of Canada and show the Ontario province.
4. Draw the Canadian flag with the right colours.
5. What is the significance of the leaf on the flag?

At the end of chapter 2:

Draw up a sequence chart

Choose what you consider to be the six most important events in chapter 2. Draw six boxes, and in each of the six boxes, list the six events that you have chosen, describing what happened.



Extension Activity: Storyboard

For the end of the novel

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell us about important events in a story. Divide a piece of paper into six boxes and complete your storyboard, illustrating the main events described in the novel.

The Incredible Journey.

1	2
3	4
5	6