

*This guide was prepared using the 1990 HarperTrophy edition, © 1956. Other editions may differ.*

#### SYNOPSIS

**Chap. 1:** In the late 1860s, 14-year-old Travis Coates accepts adult responsibility on his family's frontier Texas ranch at Salt Licks on Songbird Creek. During the cash-poor years of the Civil War, Papa and other cattlemen pool their herds and drive them to the new market at Abilene, Kansas. Before departure, Papa assigns Travis the job of head of the family and caretaker of his mother and five-year-old brother Arliss. Papa promises to reward Travis with a horse, but thinks the boy needs to replace his aged dog Bell, who died the previous summer from rattlesnake bite while the men were cutting hay. Travis works hard to replace his father by chopping wood, milking, hauling water, hunting game, and plowing with Jumper, a cantankerous dun mule. He drives Arliss from the spring, the family's main water source, and plows till sundown, when Jumper stops. Travis strikes him in the jaw to make him finish the corn rows. The family waits until Travis arrives for supper. That night, he goes to bed satisfied that he is capable of replacing Papa.

**Chap. 2:** The next morning, in the dog run, a storage room and summer sleeping quarters that joins the two rooms of the Coates' dirt-floor log cabin, Travis encounters Old Yeller, who has stolen and gulped down a side of middling meat. He kicks at the dog, which yelps and runs. When he tries to evict the dog, Arliss claims him. Mama agrees that the family should accept the dog and adds that Arliss deserves a pet, just as Travis did at that age. She sends Travis to shoot a doe for meat.

**Chap. 3:** Travis rides Jumper to Salt Licks, where he encounters javelina hogs. He laughs at squirrel antics and startles a doe. By standing still, he manages to shoot a doe. After finding Little Arliss and the dog playing in the spring, Travis dislikes him even more for dirtying the water supply. He throws rocks at Old Yeller; his brother retaliates. Mama switches Arliss and scolds Travis for being bossy. Travis hangs up the doe in a liveoak and suspends fresh cuts in the dog run. Old Yeller is careful about eating only discarded leg bones.

**Chap. 4:** Several days later, Travis calls the family to watch a bull fight. The bulls meet in the clearing with Old Yeller in pursuit. While Travis watches from the fence, the longhorn charges the roan and crashes into the fence, knocking Travis to the ground. Travis flees to the cabin and reaches for a whip to stop them from ramming the outside walls. Mama suggests setting Old Yeller on them, but he ducks and runs to the woods. Travis cracks the rawhide. The longhorn forces the roan into a Mexican cart, which spins down the hill and jolts the roan into the spring. The longhorn stands gaping. He licks the spinning wheel, skins his long tongue, and runs.

**Chap. 5:** Arliss is notorious for catching live things and

putting them in his pockets. Mama makes Travis teach him how to kill snakes. He scolds Arliss for taking credit for the catfish that Old Yeller catches. The fish fins Arliss's hand. Mama dresses the sore hand with a poultice. Travis splits wood until nearly sunset, when Arliss gets in trouble for yanking the leg of a bear cub. His dog saves him by fighting off the angry she-bear.

**Chap. 6:** Travis realizes he loves Arliss and admits that the dog has courage and value. He lets Old Yeller sleep in the boys' bed and uses him to tree squirrels; a week later, the dog joins him for hunting a turkey that was eating peas in the garden. Arliss scares the turkey away, but the dog locates him. Oddly, the dog refuses to eat roast turkey, yet seems slick and fat.

When a ne'er-do-well named Bud Searcy brings his 11 year-old granddaughter Lisbeth to visit, he describes the drought and how Jed Simpson's boy Rosal clubbed a fox with "hydrophobia." He adds an anecdote about an uncle who died of the disease after chaining himself to a tree to protect his family from contagion. He tells about a panther killing Joe Anson's colts.

After dinner, Searcy comments that some animal has been stealing meat and eggs throughout the settlement, including beef ribs from a barbecue. At the spring, Lisbeth divulges to Travis that the varmint is Old Yeller, but she promises not to tell. She tells Travis that her blue-tick dog, Miss Prissy, is about to have pups sired by Old Yeller.

**Chap. 7:** Travis confides to Mama Old Yeller's thievery. To stop Old Yeller's roaming, Travis tries tying him, but the dog chews himself free. Arliss refuses to leave the dog howling in the corncrib. Travis lets him sleep in his room and develops ringworm. The dog sleeps with Travis in the corn patch and helps him stop coons from stealing corn and skunks from eating melons. After the heifer Spot has a calf, Old Yeller helps Travis break her for milking.

**Chap. 8:** Burn Sanderson, a newcomer to Salt Licks, arrives from San Antonio. Along the way, one of his herd dogs disappeared. He claims Old Yeller, but Arliss has a fit and throws rocks. Sanderson decides that the family loves him too much to lose him. He gives them Old Yeller in exchange for a home-cooked dinner. After lunch, he takes Travis aside and warns him about rampant rabies. Travis declares he can exterminate any animal that shows symptoms of the disease.

**Chap. 9:** The next day, Old Yeller herds range hogs, the ears of which Travis must crop for identification. Old Yeller bluffs the boars into charging and leads them to the liveoak, where Travis ropes and lifts each for cutting the ears. After he castrates each hog, he lets it go free to forage. The job takes an hour.

**Chap. 10:** After Travis marks forty-six hogs, Bud tells him about a group of eight hogs he'd missed. The next morning, Travis leaves for the bat cave beyond Salt Branch. He stands

## OLD YELLER

above a bank to rope the pigs. When the dirt bank falls, he falls into the herd and receives a serious wound in his right calf. Old Yeller rescues him by putting himself in the way of slashing tusks. Travis runs, falls into a prickly pear, and injures his hip. He finds Old Yeller under a sandstone rock, his intestines bulging from a torn belly. Travis binds his wound and orders him to stay until he can get help.

**Chap. 11:** Travis's return strains his cut muscle. Mama treats the leg with turpentine and puts him to bed for a week. He insists on locating Old Yeller. Mama agrees after making a drag from rawhide and pillows. They follow circling buzzards. After sending Arliss to find a lizard, Mama sews up the torn belly with a hair from Jumper's tail. With Travis astride, the mule pulls them home by travois just before dark.

**Chap. 12:** For several weeks, Travis and his dog recuperate with the help of Mama's cold compresses and poultices of prickly pear. During the late summer drought, she ties a drag to Jumper's right front leg to keep him out of the corn. Arliss frets because there is no one to play with. Bud Searcy and Lisbeth return to help Travis with his chores. Lisbeth brings one of Miss Prissy's seven speckled pups, which she gives to Travis. Travis disappoints her by his indifference to the pup. Bud believes it his responsibility to help the women until their husbands return. He leaves Lisbeth to help out.

**Chap. 13:** Lisbeth surprises them by being useful at carrying water, feeding chickens, carrying wood, cooking, washing dishes, and treating Travis's leg. She helps Mama gather corn. Travis is annoyed that a girl can perform his work. One evening, Spot does not return for milking. When she does return, she rejects her calf. Travis realizes that he must kill the cow and the roan bull for obvious symptoms of rabies.

**Chap. 14** Travis also shoots the calf. He fears the infection of animals may get worse than he can handle.

**Chap. 15:** At dark, Travis worries about Mama and Lisbeth. They fend off a rabid wolf, which infects Old Yeller. Fearful of harming his dog, Travis shoots the wolf. Mama explains that Old Yeller has been infected. Travis proposes tying up the dog or shutting him in the corncrib until he shows signs of rabies. Then, at Mama's insistence, he also shoots his dog.

**Chap. 16:** For days, Travis mourns. After an all-night rain, Papa returns with the horse that he had promised. Travis is still mourning. Papa explains the good and bad of farm life and stresses that maturity requires an acceptance of all aspects of nature. A week later, Travis emerges from depression when he sees the speckled pup stealing food, a trait he inherited from Old Yeller. Travis decides to take Arliss and the pup squirrel hunting.

### TIME LINE

- 1519 Alonso Alvarez de Pineda maps the Texas coast.
- 1528 Cabeza de Vaca explores Texas.
- 1541 Coronado travels to west Texas.
- 1542 De Soto explores northeast Texas.
- 1682 Spanish missionaries build missions near El Paso.
- 1718 Spaniards build a mission and fort in San Antonio.
- 1810 Mexico gains independence from Spain.
- 1821 Texas becomes part of Mexico; American settlers arrive.
- 1835 American settlers take up arms against Mexican government.
- 1836 Texas gains independence from Mexico.
- 1846 The United States annexes Texas.

- 1861 Texas secedes from the Union and joins the Confederacy.
- 1865 Civil War ends.
- 1867 Texas drovers move longhorns along the Chisholm Trail.
- 1869 Texas is readmitted to the Union.

### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A staunch conservationist and lover of the Old West, Frederick Benjamin Gipson wrote of the commonplaces of frontier history and family life. Born February 7, 1908, to ranchers and cotton farmers Emma Dieshler and Beckton "Beck" Gipson in Mason, Texas, he earned money as a farm hand during his years at Mason High School. His varied jobs after high school included mule skinner, harvester, and goatherd.

From 1933 to 1937, Gipson studied journalism at the University of Texas, where he reported for *The Daily Texan*. For three years, he honed his writing skills while on staff as reporter and columnist at the *Paris, Texas, News*, *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, *Denver Post*, and the *San Angelo Standard-Times*. From there he moved into freelance work in screenplays such as *The Return of the Texan*, television plays, young adult fiction, pulp westerns, and articles for *Liberty*, *Look*, *Collier's*, and *Reader's Digest*.

At age 32, Gipson resettled in Mason, Texas, and composed *Around Our Place*, a syndicated column. In 1951, he serialized *The Home Place* in the *Philadelphia Sunday Bulletin*. From 1953 to 1955, he edited nonfiction westerns for *True West*. In 1956, Gipson dedicated his masterpiece, *Old Yeller*, to his parents in gratitude for their frontier storytelling. He wrote the screen and television adaptations of *The Travels of Jaimie McPheeters*, which ran as a television series from 1963-1964, starring Kurt Russell.

Gipson spent most of his life at his 165-acre ranch in Mason. His first wife, Tommie Eloise Wynn, bore two sons, Philip and Thomas. Gipson died at home on August 14, 1973, and was interred in the State Cemetery in Austin. Local historians honored his life with a tour of local sites, which features the Gipson home.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

Gipson won acclaim for his realistic depiction of frontier violence between Mexicans and Indians, cattlemen and nesters, and lawmen and felons. He speaks knowledgeably of open countryside, hard times, trail driving, and the gentling of the trans-Mississippi terrain. His classic, *Old Yeller*, and its sequel, *Little Arliss*, earned a following among young readers and families for honest scenarios of nature and the heavy responsibility of rearing a family on the plains. In 1965, he presided over the Texas Institute of Letters, to which he was awarded a fellowship in 1970.

Gipson's screen adaptation of *Old Yeller* (1957) starred Dorothy McGuire, Fess Parker, and Tommy Kirk as the Coates family, with Kevin Corcoran and Chuck Connors in lesser roles. The film premiered at the Odeon Theater in Gipson's hometown. He also adapted screen versions of *Hound-Dog Man* (1959), starring Fabian, Stuart Whitman, and Carol Lynley; *Savage Sam* (1963), a Walt Disney film starring Brian Keith, Tommy Kirk, and Kevin Corcoran; and a television story, *Brush Roper*. Gipson's honoraria include the McMurray Bookshop award, Cokesbury Book Store award by a Texas writer on a local theme, a Northwest Pacific citation, Maggie Award for a Western, William Allen White Children's Book

## OLD YELLER



award, and First Sequoyah award.

### OTHER WORKS BY FRED GIPSON

- Big Bend: A Homesteader's Story* (with J. O. Langford) (1973)  
*The Cow Killers* (1956)  
*Cowhand: The Story of a Working Cowboy* (1948)  
*Curly and the Wild Boar* (posthumous) (1980)  
*The Fabulous Empire: Colonel Zack Miller's Story* (1946)  
*The Home Place* (1950)  
*Hound-Dog Man* (1949)  
*Little Arliss* (posthumous) (1978)  
*Recollection Creek* (1955)  
*Savage Sam* (1962)  
*The Trail-Driving Rooster* (1955)

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Butcher, Fanny, "Review," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, July 15, 1956, p. 3.  
Carlsen, G. Robert. *Books and the Teen-Age Reader*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.  
*Contemporary Authors*, <galenet.gale.com>.  
Davis, H. L., "Review," *New York Times*, July 15, 1956, p. 5.  
Dobie, J. Frank. *Guide to Life and Literature of the Southwest*, <www.islandmm.com/llsw/llswp.htm>, Aug. 16, 1996.  
———. *Guide to the Life and Literature of the Southwest*. Dallas: SMU Press, 1952.  
Field, Carol, "Review," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 15, 1956, p. 6.  
"Fred Gipson," <genforum.familytreemaker.com/gipson.

"Fred Gipson Papers," <www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/HRC/fa/gipson.hp.html>.

- Gillespie, John, and Diana Lembo. *Junior Plots: A Book Talk Manual for Teachers and Librarians*. New York: R. R. Bowker, 1967.  
Henderson, R. W., "Review," *Library Journal*, July 1956, p. 1699.  
Hogan, William, "Review," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 1956, p. 19.  
La Farge, Oliver, "Review," *Saturday Review*, July 21, 1956, p. 17.  
Maddocks, Melvin, "Review," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 12, 1956, p. 7.  
"Obituary," *Library Journal*, Oct. 15, 1973.  
"Obituary," *New York Times*, Aug. 15, 1973.  
"Obituary," *Washington Post*, Aug. 16, 1973.  
"Old Yeller," <rampages.onramp.net/~classics/8\_oyell.htm>.  
"Old Yeller," <www2.connectnet.com/~dmp/G5\_writing/EmilyT.html>.  
"Review," *Kirkus*, May 1, 1956, p. 320.  
"Review," *New Yorker*, July 14, 1956, p. 93.  
"Review," *Saturday Review*, Nov., 1956, p. 70.  
"Review," *Time*, July 23, 1956, p. 88.  
"Review," *Wilson Review*, July 1956, p. 175.  
Sackett, Susan. *The Hollywood Reporter Book of Box Office Hits*. New York: Billboard Books, 1996.  
Scoggin, M. C., "Review," *Horn Book*, October 1956, p. 371.  
Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *Encyclopedia of Frontier Literature*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 1997.

## OLD YELLER

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the value of responsibility
2. To describe the pet/owner relationship
3. To evaluate the need for friendship, nurturance, comfort, acceptance, and emotional support
4. To account for bonding with a strange animal
5. To define grief
6. To discuss methods of teaching responsibility to youth
7. To comment on the dangers of living in the wild
8. To express the need for responsibility and pragmatism
9. To characterize disappointment
10. To comment on individual responses to loss

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To explain Travis's relationship with Papa, Mama, Arliss, Lisbeth, and visitors as well as with wild and domestic animals
2. To assess the Coates family in terms of respect and rewards
3. To account for the author's focus on realism
4. To order events that tax Travis's strength, especially working the hogs
5. To describe turning points in Travis's understanding of nature
6. To account for the importance of the Texas prairie in protecting crops, fetching water, and seeking healing plants
7. To predict how Travis will train the horse and pup
8. To explain why Papa must define the two sides of nature
9. To evaluate Mama's role as parent, rancher, medic, veterinarian, and cook
10. To determine how Travis copes with danger

### LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Fred Gipson's style, present the following terms and applications to his novel:

**bildungsroman** literally a "formation novel," which describes the coming-of-age of an untried or naive youth. After Travis's father and other local cattlemen leave for an extended livestock drive to Abilene, Kansas, the boy accepts the mindset of protector of the house and family. He performs chores carefully and deliberately and recognizes the danger of losing the corn to raccoons and skunks, allowing fighting bulls to destroy the cabin, incurring difficulties with Comanches or Apaches, or muddying the drinking water. His concerted effort to preserve the homestead and his self-satisfaction in achievement illustrate his readiness for adulthood.

**realism** a re-creation of life in theme, plot, setting, mood, and characterization, as displayed by the starkness of rabid animals burning in a two-day conflagration to keep infection from reaching domestic animals or drinking water. Fred Gipson illustrates the discomforts and dangers of life in a crude, isolated prairie cabin by explaining why Travis must endure treatment with kerosene to save his leg from gangrene and by showing the long hours and wearying tasks Mama Coates undertakes after her prime helper is downed with a severely gored calf. The unending tasks suggest that the women and children who survived Texas prairie life were stalwart and responsible.

**idiom** a phrase, grammatical construction, or expression that contains more meaning than the simple sum of its words,

for example, Travis's reference to lies as "big windies" and the casual naming of a raging bull as "old roany," an indication of its reddish brown hide. The everyday verbs and nouns of frontier dialect permeate character exchanges, for example, "bawling" calves, the desire to beat Arliss "to a frazzle," the animals that "made to fight" Mama, and Travis's command to his dog, "Here Yeller! Get 'em, boy! Sic 'em!"

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller* is at once confined and expansive. Out of necessity, Travis and Arliss stay close to home to help Mama with ranch work in Papa's absence. The mundane chores require specialized knowledge. He appears to have learned from his parents the basics of most chores.

Other aspects of prairie and ranch life force Travis away from Mama and safety. To keep the family supplied in fresh meat, he must venture away from home turf to shoot squirrels, wild turkey, deer, and rabbits. His knowledge of the terrain helps him to corral the wild hogs for notching the ears and castration and to select the best place to fell the rabid calf for ease of burning the carcass. His understanding of predators requires that he secure Old Yeller under a sandstone ledge and hurry back to save him from protracted agony.

The outside world remains starkly dangerous to Travis in his father's absence. He must consider the possibility of crossing into Comanche and Apache territory or incurring an Indian raid. Visitors fill in details from their own experience, as with Bud Searcy and Burn Sanderson's knowledge of the rabies epidemic and predictions of drought. By the novel's conclusion, Travis has balanced knowledge of home front with the threat of the wild and kept his family reasonably safe and comfortable despite his injury and loss of the family cow and dog.

### CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about Texas, Indians, survival, frontier literature, westering, parenting, values, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

#### Fiction

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*  
William Armstrong, *Sounder*  
Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*  
Janie Holt Giles, *Hannah Fowler*  
A. B. Guthrie, *The Big Sky*  
Robert Heinlein, *Farmer in the Sky* and *The Star Beast*  
Louis L'Amour, *Conagher*  
Patricia MacLachlan, *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *Skylark*  
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, *Shiloh*  
Robert Newton Peck, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*  
Charles Portis, *True Grit*  
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *The Yearling*  
Jack Schaefer, *Shane*  
John Steinbeck, *The Red Pony*  
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, *The Yearling*  
Wilson Rawls, *Where the Red Fern Grows*  
Jill Paton Walsh, *Green Book*  
Jessamyn West, *Except for Me and Thee*  
Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*  
Owen Wister, *The Virginian*

## OLD YELLER

### Nonfiction

T. R. Fehrenbach, *Comanches: The Destruction of a People and Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*

Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*

Theodore Roosevelt, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*

David Paul Smith, *Frontier Defense in the Civil War: Texas Rangers and Rebels*

J. W. Wilbarger, *Indian Depredations in Texas*

### Internet

"The Ballad of Davy Crockett,"

<[www.cs.monash.edu.au/~tbp/disney/lyrics/tv/davy](http://www.cs.monash.edu.au/~tbp/disney/lyrics/tv/davy)>, 1996.

Burns, Ken, and Stephen Ives, "The West,"

<[www3.pbs.org/weata/thewest](http://www3.pbs.org/weata/thewest)>, 1996.

"Daniel Boone," <[www.berksweb.com/boonetext.html](http://www.berksweb.com/boonetext.html)>, 1999.

"Frontier Literature," <[www.ci.hickory.nc.us/library/bibs/frontier.htm](http://www.ci.hickory.nc.us/library/bibs/frontier.htm)>.

"The Old West," <[www.nmt.edu/~joy/west.html](http://www.nmt.edu/~joy/west.html)>.

"Outdoor Drama," <[www.unc.edu/depts/outdoor/index.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/outdoor/index.html)>.

"The Poetry of Bret Harte,"

<[www.solopublications.com/jurn6103.htm](http://www.solopublications.com/jurn6103.htm)>.

"Riders of the Purple Sage," <[unp.unl.edu/UP/grerix.htm](http://unp.unl.edu/UP/grerix.htm)>.

"A Walking Tour of Mason, Texas," <[www.sig.net/~mason-coc/walktour.htm](http://www.sig.net/~mason-coc/walktour.htm)>.

### Videos

*Old Yeller* (Disney, 1957)

*Savage Sam* (Disney, 1963)

*Shane* (Paramount, 1953)

*Souder* (Paramount, 1972)

*Where the Red Fern Grows* (LIV Entertainment, 1974)

*The Yearling* (MGM, 1946)

### THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller* should include these aspects:

#### Themes

- immaturity
- family
- responsibility
- ranch life
- labor
- achievement
- dilemma
- loss
- recovery

#### Motifs

- living in an isolated area
- accepting the laws of nature
- coping with loss of a pet
- learning an adult's responsibility
- accepting the brutality of animal life

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Chapter and page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which each item is taken.

1. Anyhow, it was the year that Papa and a bunch of other Salt Licks settlers formed a "pool herd" of their little separate bunches of steers and trailed them to the new cattle market of Abilene, Kansas. (Chap. 1, p. 2)  
(A railroad shipping complex north of Texas, Abilene was the ideal shipping point for livestock driven over the

*Chisholm Trail to Kansas, where animals were sorted for purpose, size, and quality and shipped to meat markets and breeding centers. The high point of the cattle business came in 1871, when 700,000 cattle made the drive from Texas.)*

2. Once he'd dragged me out of Birdsong Creek when I was about to drown and another time he'd given warning in time to keep some raiding Comanches from stealing and eating our mule, Jumper. (Chap. 1, pp. 6-7)  
(The Coates family lives near the Comanche, a major nomadic tribe of hunters, livestock breeders, and traders. Members of the Uto-Aztecan language group, they were descendants of a group that separated from the Shoshone in the 18th century. Renowned for their skill with horses and their prowess as warriors, the tribe was able to stave off white incursions until the 1870s. Famous Comanche chiefs included Quanah Parker and Ten Bears.)
3. She saw me following after him with a mesquite sprout in one hand and his clothes in the other. (Chap. 1, pp. 9-10)  
(Mesquite is a scraggly plant with many uses. Desert Indians prized the spiny mesquite shrub for its sugary pods, firm branches, and use as a thickener. The beans were cooked with ground corn to produce hot cereal. The Pueblo made a favorite recipe of seeds, berries, and mesquite flour. It was also useful in making beer, stew, pudding, dumplings, bread, and mush. The gum yielded glue, hair dye, mouthwash, and ointment.)
4. I found him at daylight when Mama told me to step out to the dog run and cut down a side of middling meat hanging to the pole rafters. (Chap. 2, p. 15)  
(Middling meat—also called side meat or flank meat—is heavily laced with fat. It is useful as a flavoring for vegetable stew or soup and as a source of bacon. On the prairie, it was cured with salt and suspended in a smokehouse, where it remained edible for months, but vulnerable to theft and marauding animals.)
5. That was so he could get a clear shot at any Comanche or Apache coming to scalp us. (Chap. 4, p. 37)  
(The Apache to whom Travis refers are desert hunter-gatherers who migrated from Canada to the Southwest. The nation is divided into Chiricahua, Jicarilla, Kiowa, Lipan, Mescalero, Tonto, Western, and Fort Sill groups. They were known for swift raids on settlers led by such legendary chiefs as Cochise and Geronimo.)
6. Then, after the yeller dog came, Little Arliss started catching even bigger game. Like cottontail rabbits and chaparral birds and a baby possum that sulked and lay like dead for the first several hours until he finally decided that Arliss wasn't going to hurt him. (Chap. 5, p. 48)  
(Arliss stalks birds and small animals in a thicket of shrubs and small trees. Chaparral grows into such a dense tangle that it serves amphibians and birds as a natural habitat and cover from predators.)
7. But as soon as Mama had wrapped his hands in a poultice of mashed-up prickly-pear root to draw out the poison, Little Arliss forgot all about his hurt. (Chap. 5, pp. 49-50)  
(Mrs. Coates concocts a poultice to treat a painful, swollen puncture wound made by catfish spines. She chooses prickly pear, a cactus that the Navaho prized for multiple purposes, such as cattle feed, mortar, tapioca,

## OLD YELLER

*syrup, pickles, jelly, and snack food.)*

8. I was packing my gun. Just as we got up to the slabrock fence that Papa had built around the corn patch, I looked over and spotted this gobbler doing our pea-picking for us. (Chap. 6, p. 63)

*(Thrifty prairie farmers used rocks from the garden for good purpose. After plowing up slabs of granite and sandstone, they formed a rock stack wall by layering each addition at an angle toward the center of the stack. Thus, without mortar, the builder used waste material to create a defense from predators and wandering livestock.)*

9. This sure looked like a case of hydrophobia to Searcy, as anybody knew that no fox in his right mind was going to jump on a hunter. (Chap. 6, p. 69)

*(Hydrophobia is another word for rabies, a deadly viral infection for which there was no cure at the time this story takes place. Animal victims froth at the mouth and wither away from a lack of nourishment and water after the virus inflames the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, and throat and inhibits swallowing. Observers who applied the term hydrophobia, meaning fear of water, assumed that the animal deliberately avoided drinking.)*

10. Of course, Old Yeller didn't sleep on the cowhide. And once, a good while later, I did break out with a little ringworm under my left arm. But I rubbed it with turpentine, just like Mama always did, and it soon went away. (Chap. 7, p. 77)

*(Ringworm is a fungal infection like mange and athlete's foot that forms an itchy red circle and causes a ring of skin to dry and flake. Mrs. Coates's favorite home treatment kills the fungus.)*

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages from the novel.

#### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. What do Travis's parents expect of him during the long community cattle drive?

*(Before leaving with neighboring cattlemen for the six-hundred mile livestock drive from Salt Licks, Texas, to Abilene, Kansas, Papa has a serious talk with his older son. He explains to Travis why he needs "cash money" and what Travis must do to protect "the womenfolks and children of Salt Licks . . . left in a wild frontier settlement to make out the best they could." Instructions include "what to do in case the Indians came off the reservation or the coons got to eating the corn or the bears got to killing too many hogs.")*

*Travis's role is comprised of hard work and wariness. As "the man of the family," he must protect his mother and Little Arliss and do his work without having to be told. He is to act like an adult rancher. His daily chores and husbandry are clear: "Now, there's cows to milk and wood to cut and young pigs to mark and fresh meat to shoot. But mainly there's the corn patch. If you don't work it right or if you let the varmints eat up the roasting ears, we'll be without bread corn for the winter.")*

2. Describe Old Yeller's courage.

*(Although he seems, at first, only an "egg sucker and*

*camp robber," Old Yeller saves the lives of the people he loves. When Little Arliss tries to hold on to the leg of a bear cub, the young animal's whimpering enrages the mother bear. When she charges Arliss, neither Travis nor Mama can get to him in time to save him from a vicious, perhaps fatal mauling. Old Yeller, "roaring like a mad bull," attacks the bear. His siege gives the others time to rescue Arliss and race to the cabin.*

*In another incident, Travis and Old Yeller round up range hogs to mark and castrate the young pigs. Lying on a cut-bank above the hogs, Travis ropes the young pigs until the bank gives way, hurtling him among the sharp-tusked adults. Old Yeller flings himself between the boy and the pack of hogs, giving Travis a chance to escape. A hog gores Travis, but Old Yeller intercedes and takes most of the punishment. Before he recovers, he also fights a rabid loafer wolf to prevent injury to Mama and Lisbeth.)*

3. How does Old Yeller prove himself a valuable work animal?

*(Old Yeller looks shiftless and untrustworthy when he first appears at the cabin dog run. His belly is distended from the middling meat he has stolen and wolfed down. His reputation as a thief of meat and eggs precedes him. Travis dislikes him until he saves Little Arliss from a bear. His value goes up when Travis takes Old Yeller hunting and discovers that the dog is an excellent stalker.*

*On the ranch, the dog proves equally valuable at mundane chores. He helps Travis catch a wild gobbler and saves the corn patch by patrolling it at night and driving off raccoons. He controls Spot by biting her nose to make her behave during milking. Beyond the yard, he herds hogs so Travis can rope the young piglets. Overall, Old Yeller turns out to be a valuable addition to the Coates' domestic animals.)*

4. How does Arliss irritate his brother?

*(Little Arliss, who is five, acts like a wild animal with no sense of responsibility. He weeps copiously, causing Travis to observe, "when Little Arliss cried he could shed more tears faster than any crier I ever saw." His worst habit is stripping off his clothes and swimming in the family's only source of drinking water, which is made more valuable because of drought. Travis loses his temper when he finds Arliss and the yellow dog rollicking in the spring. After Travis throws rocks, Arliss begins pelting him in return. When Burn Sanderson comes to the cabin and trades the dog for a home-cooked meal, Travis is annoyed by the blather that Arliss spouts at dinner and considers him an outrageous liar.*

*Arliss remains obnoxious, but his brother suppresses his irritation and begins to see him as a normal small boy. While Travis slowly and painfully recuperates from a tusk slash to his right calf, Arliss pesters him because he has nobody to play with. Nonetheless, Travis discovers that he truly loves his little brother after he has a close brush with the angry bear. In the final scene, Arliss has returned to the spring to swim and splash with the speckled pup. Travis laughs and chooses not "to go beat them to a frazzle for messing up our drinking water." Like a mature brother, he takes the child and pup for a squirrel hunt.)*

## OLD YELLER

5. How do the family members survive rabies?

*(Travis and Mama hear from Bud Searcy and Burn Sanderson about the arrival of rabies to the territory. There is little that anyone can do to halt the disease. Travis and Mama watch for animals that act unnaturally, a symptom of the virus. When a bull appears behaving peculiarly, Travis concludes that he has hydrophobia, the common name for rabies. He expertly puts a bullet between the bull's eyes. The carcass becomes a health hazard so near the cabin and threatens the family's water supply. Mama and Lisbeth collect wood and burn the carcass so no animal will eat the flesh and contract the virus.)*

*The siege does not end with the one animal. When Spot, the family milk cow, arrives acting erratically, Travis follows her to a likely site and shoots her. Then he, his mother, and Lisbeth burn her carcass. Later, a loafer wolf threatens the women until Old Yeller intervenes. The upshot of the match between dog and wolf is exposure of Old Yeller to the virus. After Travis shoots the wolf, his mother indicates that Old Yeller must be put down to free the family and their livestock from contagion. Travis dutifully complies.)*

### Questions 6-8 (Interpretive Level)

6. What type of rancher is Mama?

*(A homesteader in the Texas prairie, Mama Coates is a cool, courageous, and competent rancher. She prioritizes jobs to allot her energies to the most important work. She gathers eggs and watches over biddies, attends to the garden and her sons, and welcomes visitors. To repay Burn Sanderson for the big yellow dog, at his request, she cooks and serves roast venison, stewed squirrel, flour gravy, black-eyed peas, cornbread, wild honey, hog-plum jelly, and fresh buttermilk. To protect the corn field, she ties a drag to Jumper. When Arliss strays from her attention, she rounds him up and keeps him busy and treats his puncture wound from a cattfish fin.)*

*The most striking proof of Mama's strength is the encounter with wild range hogs, which injure both Travis and Old Yeller. Mama figures out how to rig Jumper with a padded travois so she won't have to carry Arliss and so she and Travis can load the injured dog and convey it home for treatment. Before setting out for the cabin, Mama plucks a hair from the mule's tail and sews up the gut wound, from which entrails protrude. She leads Jumper through the grassiest stretches to spare Old Yeller from jostling. At home, she treats Travis with cold compresses and mashed prickly pear root poultices to allay his fever and infection.)*

*At the end of the novel, Mama proves equal to more danger. She and Lisbeth survive attack by a mad loafer wolf. She knocks the attacker to the ground with a chinaberry pole before Old Yeller arrives. After weeping with her head on Travis's shoulder, she says, "I'll shoot him if you can't, but either way, we've got it to do. We just can't take the chance, Son!" For days afterward, Mama tenderly assuages Travis's grief and reports to Papa the boy's suffering.)*

7. What is Papa's role in the novel?

*(Papa appears only briefly in the novel. He explains to his son the importance of selling the herd in Abilene to*

*acquire "cash money" during the post-war hard times. After assigning chores to Travis, he departs with neighboring cattlemen and remains gone until the novel's end. In his absence, he is not physically on duty as rancher, husband, and parent, yet his influence is obvious in Travis's mature behavior and acceptance of responsibility for ranch, livestock, and family. The boy revives his father's wisdom by recalling his father's words about hunting, rounding up range hogs, and using a working dog.)*

*At the high point of danger, Travis wishes that his father were near. He clings to his parental advice and longs to have another man about the ranch. When Papa returns and brings the horse that Travis wants, the calming, protective influence of the man of the house is apparent. To comfort Travis, Papa follows Mama's lead and takes him aside to explain the balance of good and bad in nature. The mature lesson comes naturally to a man who has made a living for his family in the Texas desert.)*

8. How does Gipson maintain point of view?

*(The narration follows a first person speaker, Travis Coates. By limiting the action and reflection to Travis's experience and thoughts, the author views ranching and the wild from a fresh, somewhat naive perspective. Through Travis, the author expresses the need for cash during the hard post-Civil War era and the importance of the drover's trail from Texas north to Kansas. The strain of chores and watchful nights is hard on a boy doing a man's work, but serves as a good preparation for his own homestead and family.)*

*Travis uses an energized frontier dialect that reveals his isolation from more refined, educated diction. He is mature enough to interpret events accurately. By his forthright commentary, he identifies for the reader animals, plants, equipment, and farm husbandry. By supplying motivation, he makes the action appeal to young and mature readers, who can identify with his work and share his adventures.)*

### Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. How does Travis cope with ranch work?:

*(It is obvious that Travis is successful in doing what Papa leaves for him to accomplish. During the hot, dry summer months, he is able to plow, hunt, milk, harvest, protect the water supply, and prevent varmints from destroying the corn. With Old Yeller as companion and working dog, he succeeds in the hard tasks of rounding up range hogs and protecting Mama and Lisbeth from a rabid loafer wolf.)*

*Significant to Travis's success is his evaluation of Old Yeller. Although he does not immediately recognize the dog's worth for ranch chores, he eventually deduces that the dog may be unattractive and invasive of the dog run, but he applies his energies to herding, catching a wild turkey, protecting the family, and rescuing the corn crop from predators. The author implies that Travis might not have done so well in Papa's absence without the intervention of Old Yeller.)*

10. Why does Travis choose wisely in deciding to kill Old Yeller?

*(The danger of rabies to a ranch community is evident*

## OLD YELLER

from the warnings Travis and Mama receive from Bud and Burn. Isolated far from veterinary assistance or an animal control agency, the family must take quick action to rid the area of the virus. Apparently, the rabid loafer wolf has bitten and infected Travis's dog. Although Travis at first proposes tying up the dog to wait for symptoms of the disease, Mama stresses, "We can't take a chance, Son."

The execution of *Old Yeller* is a sign of Travis's maturity. He understands that an adult male and head of a family has innocent people to protect, including Mama, Arliss, and Lisbeth. Thus, Travis has little choice because "there was very little chance of *Old Yeller's* escaping the sickness." Travis acknowledges that shooting his dog "was going to kill something inside me." That "something" is the innocence of boyhood. By the time Papa returns, Travis is already a responsible young man.)

### Questions 11-13 (Creative Level)

11. Design a monument honoring ranchers and cattlemen like Papa and Mama Coates, Travis, Burn Sanderson, and neighboring settlers of Texas and other parts of the west. For a fitting dedication, select a quotation from a major Western or frontier writer.
12. List moments that indicate that Travis might make a worthy family man and rancher. Project how the story would change if he had accompanied Papa on the cattle drive and left Mama and Arliss to fend for themselves.
13. Create a scene in which Lisbeth comes to the Coates ranch to spend the summer. Indicate interests and concerns they share, particularly an appreciation of animals and a shared pride in accomplishment.

### ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

#### Art and Music

1. Draw wrap-around cover sketches to reflect life on a small Texas ranch during the early mid-19th century. Depict a small two-room cabin with dirt floor and mud chinking, removal of crabgrass and mules from a garden, or a group of cattlemen driving their unified herd to market.
2. Draw a cartoon strip depicting the joys of a small boy in playing in the spring, catching toads and lizards, delighting lunch guests with lies, chasing a puppy around a cabin, and throwing rocks at his older brother.
3. Make a mural of the prairie that surrounds Songbird Creek and Salt Licks, Texas. Include wild animals and plants mentioned in the novel, in particular, wolves, water snakes, diamondbacks, buzzards, herons, swallows, skunks, raccoons, possums, cottontail rabbits, catfish, bear grass, prickly pear, chinaberry, liveoaks, mesquite, and chaparral.
4. Summarize aspects of prairie life and cattle drives from John Lomax's collections, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* or *Songs of the Cattle Trail and Cow Camp*. Add verses to familiar songs to celebrate Travis's adventures.

#### Drama and Speech

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of the treatment of *Old Yeller's* torn body and the arrival of Papa from

Abilene. Include a list of characters, props, music, make-up, costumes, and lighting necessary to the scene, such as mule, rope, needle, colt, calf, prickly pear poultice, cold compresses, water, rifle, and cowhide.

2. Dramatize in a short skit some ways that Mama and Papa teach Travis about children, storing food, animal husbandry, and ranching. Emphasize the importance of parents to Travis's impressionable years.
3. Write a scene in which Travis accompanies the men of Salt Licks on the next cattle drive to Abilene. Mention sights, foods, duties, and adventures that he can share with Burn, Lisbeth, and Arliss.
4. Characterize in an oral theme Travis's relationship with neighbors and family. Improvise dialogue that displays his courtesy, gratitude, and pragmatism.

#### Education

1. Describe the activities of a ranch that are suited to children. Name chores that Travis, Lisbeth, and Arliss can manage without close supervision, such as pulling weeds, fetching water, gathering corn, herding livestock, repairing a split rail fence, and chopping wood. Explain why agriculture and animal husbandry build self-esteem and sensitivity to nature and ecology. Contrast ranching with town life, which imposes a different series of responsibilities.
2. Role-play situations that cause Travis to think for himself. Determine what he learns about improvising and self-preservation.

#### Geography

1. Draw a map indicating the route from Salt Licks, Texas, to Abilene, Kansas. Insert routes followed by drovers and wagon trains. Contrast major highways that have replaced dirt trails.
2. Compose a paragraph in which you explain why Mama and Papa decide that Birdsong Creek is the best place to homestead.
3. Using the scale of miles on a map of the Southwest compute the distance between Salt Licks and Abilene, Kansas.

#### History and Social Studies

1. Explain in a paragraph the difficulty of surviving on the Texas prairie. Discuss variances of weather, rocky soil, inadequate rainfall, predators, isolation, and other threats to a stable income.
2. Make a short oral presentation describing cabin building and ranching methods in Texas. Explain the use of implements and necessities, such as a trace chain, ash hopper, wedge, split rail fence, scythe, reins, rawhide whip, saw grass string, hide bottom chair, mud chinking, and black powder charge. Include an explanation of letting hogs roam free to forage in the wild. Comment on the need to stand clear of longhorn bulls in a challenge match.
3. Read about the history of Texas, particularly the roles of settlers, ranchers, cattle drives, Comanches and Apaches, soldiers, revolutionaries, and westering wagon trains. Compose a short statement about characteristics these early figures have in common. Discuss why the good and bad side of nature affects all Texans.
4. Compute the cost of inoculating farm animals against rabies versus the suffering and hospitalization necessary



## OLD YELLER

to treat a human victim of the disease.

5. Summarize the history of succeeding waves of immigrants to Texas, including illegal Mexicans who cross the Rio Grande and former slaves escaping the Civil War and Reconstruction violence. Describe the political and economic climate the year Texas entered the Union.
6. Report on the racial makeup of Texas to pre-Columbian times. Note the current breakdown of races, including Hispanic, native American, Asian, and African-American populations.
7. Collect lines from *Old Yeller* that disclose passage of time and the relative ages of characters. Include information about changes in the garden that indicate the time of year in which events occur.

### Language Arts

1. Write a brief explanation of such local idioms as "fall to staves," "cat-stepping blue roan," "boar coon," "corn shuck mattress," "egg-sucking dog," "blue ticked she dog," "middling meat," "draw a bead," "dun mule," "dog run," "blind staggers," or "loafer wolf."
2. Compose an extended definition of parent. Explain why Mama allows Travis to boss and punish his little brother. Apply the definition of authority figure to Bud Searcy and Papa. Determine the admirable qualities of each.
3. Create a glossary of terms pertaining to prairie ranching and livestock.
4. Make a short oral presentation explaining images from the novel, such as "two longhorn range bulls met at the house and pulled off their big fight," "the mud nests were so thick on the face of the cliff that, from a distance, the wall looked like it was covered with honeycomb," "Jumper could clear the moon if he took a notion to see the other side of it," "turned out of his pocket a waddled-up baby copperhead that nearly threw Mama into spasms," and "big and savage enough to hamstring a horse or drag down a full-grown cow." Create a bulletin board or posters illustrating the purpose of these images.
5. Compose an extended definition of realism. Using examples from the texts, explain why Mama sends Arliss to fetch a lizard, how a drag stops Jumper from eating the corn, where Mama finds the best roots for poultices, why Papa wants the family to have another dog, why some cows give no extra milk, how kerosene cleanses a wound, and how animals display symptoms of rabies.
6. Write a diary entry describing life on a Texas prairie ranch. Include activities that involve helping with household chores, notching the ears of hogs, fetching water in a cowhide bucket, stalking a wounded doe, sewing up a wound, making lye water for soap, treating fever with hot compresses, and braiding bear grass for string.
7. Compose a theme on maturity. Explain how maturity is achieved through small increments of awareness and appreciation, especially Travis's concern for Arliss in times of danger and his insistence on returning to Old Yeller to treat his wounds. Relate Travis's maturation to events in your own life when you learned a valuable lesson through pain, hard labor, or loss.
8. Join a discussion group to determine justification for the author's grim view of life. Explain what loss means to him. Analyze his attitude toward Travis, Bell, the decapitated rattlesnake, raging bulls, javelina hogs, and Old Yeller. Suggest reasons why critics believe that Gipson's approach is realistic and believable.
9. Locate examples of similes from the texts, such as "Arliss was screaming his head off, and here came the big dog with his wet fur rising along the ridge of his backbone, baying me like I was a panther," "He was roaring like a mad bull," "his belly was swelled up as tight and round as a pumpkin," "They don't have much top, but lots of knotty roots, shaped sort of like sweet potatoes," and "So I sat there, holding as still as a stump, searching the clearing around the Licks." Compose a paragraph explaining why each simile is effective in creating a graphic mental image. Comment on why Fred Gipson selects many comparatives from nature.
10. Explain in a theme the significance of Travis's decision to take Arliss and the pup hunting. Suggest an ending for their hunt and the preservation of meat for family use. Contrast a late example of Travis's attitude toward his brother with an event from the first chapters.
11. Sample some books about the hardships connected with prairie life, for example *O Pioneers*, or watch a classic movie such as *The Grapes of Wrath*. Discuss with a group the aspects of ranching that give strength and a sense of place and commitment to isolated Texas families.
12. Write a theme in which you characterize Travis as rancher and head of the household. Predict how he will cope with hard choices and loss, such as shooting another suffering animal, Arliss's maturity, or another serious injury.
13. Lead a discussion of Fred Gipson's philosophy of the importance of trusting young people with mature duties. Draw on Forrest Carter's novel *The Education of Little Tree*, Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, Maya Angeles *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, or Robert Frost's "Out, Out—."

### Psychology

1. Explain in a short speech the effect of mourning on Travis. Make reference to his loss of two dogs a year apart and the severe injury to his leg.
2. Contrast the style of discipline used by Mama and Travis. Determine which is the better way of rearing Arliss.
3. Lead a panel discussion of how maturity alters people. Discuss ways in which Travis learns to respect the harsh truths of nature. Suggest ways in which Mama helps him grow up. Project how Travis will help Arliss mature.
4. Lead a discussion of how pets help isolated people deal with boredom, fatigue, and loneliness. Suggest types of animals that might benefit different ages and personalities. Refer specifically to Bell, Old Yeller, Miss Prissy, and the speckled pup.

### Science and Health

1. List home remedies and methods that Mama uses to treat laceration, torn tissue, and fever. Consult books on herbs for sources of native American medication on the Texas prairie, such as cactus, mesquite, agave, willow, manzanilla berries, jojoba, and sweet grass.
2. Describe first aid for the bite of a venomous snake. Make a chart of faulty cures from folklore, particularly

## OLD YELLER

drinking whisky, eating a portion of cooked snake, chewing snakeroot, or cutting X's on the fang marks with a knife and sucking out the poison.

3. Compose a paragraph on the treatment of injured or ailing animals, such as a gored dog. List local sources of information on recovery, rehabilitation, and medication, particularly a zoo, veterinary clinic, biology department, humane society, animal shelter, library, health department, encyclopedia, handbook, or Internet.
4. Explain the role of buzzards in the nitrogen cycle.

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Relate the following literary terms to *Old Yeller*: idiom, denouement, symbol, simile, flat and round characters, setting, dialogue, conflict, atmosphere, mood, motivation, rising action, climax, falling action, flashback, and tone. Determine why Travis's experience with managing livestock, like a stage drama, has a beginning, middle, and end.
2. Lead a discussion of adult responsibilities to children. Determine why Travis loses his patience and scolds Arliss and why his mother finds disciplining the younger child easier and less confrontational. Suggest appropriate punishments for the types of infractions that Arliss incurs.
3. Contrast Travis's responses to life on an isolated ranch with the biographies of other people who have experienced similar sufferings, such as Conrad Richter, Sarah Winnamucca, John Brown, Laura Ingalls Wilder, and N. Scott Momaday. Discuss your findings with a small group.
4. Listen to recorded poems about animals and plants, such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Eagle," Gerard Manley Hopkins's "The Windhover," Christina Rossetti's "The Woodspurge," and Joseph Bruchac's "Birdfoot's Grandpa." Compose poetic lines to express your own experiences with farm animals, pets, wild birds, insects, and other life forms.
5. Read Marjorie Kinnan Rawling's *The Yearling*, Jane Wagner's *J. T.*, Jean Craighead George's *Julie of the Wolves*, or William Armstrong's *Sounder*. Explain what the main character has in common with Travis. Discuss qualities that give the protagonists strength in difficult situations. Explain how they respond to discipline.
6. List the chores necessary to the running of a ranch in the mid-1800s, such as chopping firewood, milking, hunting, hanging meat, braiding bear grass string, treating wounds, driving cattle to market, attending to livestock, mending fences and chinking, making soap from fat and lye water, and harvesting hay. Break down the chores into those performed by Papa, Mama, and Travis.
7. Listen to recorded tall tales about the Old West, including the poems of Robert Service and Mary Hunter Austin. Compose your own versions of stories about the area where you live.
8. Write a newspaper account of the battle against rabies. Describe tasks performed by Burn, Bud, Mama, Lisbeth, and Travis. Strengthen your writing with direct quotations from visitors and family members.
9. Role-play the arrival of Papa to the ranch. Demonstrate the difficulty he has in explaining to Travis the harsh side

of nature. Act out Travis's delight with his new horse.

10. Lead a debate concerning whether or not Travis is mature enough to accompany the community ranchers on their next drive to Abilene. Consider all possibilities before extending an invitation for him to join the men.
11. Compose a letter to Travis or Mama or Lisbeth in which you ask questions that the book does not answer, such as the name of the speckled pup, Papa's success on the drive, Arliss's understanding of rabies, the cost of replacing Spot, Mama's grief for Old Yeller, and Travis's experiences in breaking his horse for ranch work. Create a reply giving likely answers to your questions.

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Make a list of scenes from the text that express attitudes toward guilt, value, loss, responsibility, and maturity. Next to each, indicate its reflection on Travis.
2. Compose brief explanations of ranching chores, for example, notching hogs, tying a mule to a drag, hanging venison, stacking rocks, and splitting logs.
3. List scenes that depict conflict, particularly the clash of two range bulls, Travis's whipping Arliss for telling lies at lunch, Old Yeller's attack on the hogs, Bell's death, Lisbeth's gift of a speckled pup, and Mama's instructions to shoot Old Yeller.
4. Compose a scene in which Mama or Travis describes life on the ranch to an outsider. Explain the importance of guarding food for the winter, watching for Comanches and Apaches, shooting squirrels, gathering prickly pear roots, and driving away predators, particular rabid animals.
5. Make a thorough list of items essential to a movie version of the text. Beside the items, explain how they fit into the action.

**OLD YELLER**

**VOCABULARY TEST**

Create a sentence about each of the following subjects using the words in parentheses as part of the sentence.

1. Papa's arrival (to-do) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Burn's exchange (grub) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. dried mud (chinking) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. rafters (middling meat) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Jumper (aggravating) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. sitting (haunches) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. prickly pear (spines) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. ledge (sandstone) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. setting (biddy chickens) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Bud (shiftless) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. boar coon (bay) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. mud nest (swallow) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. stump (mesquite) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. hydrophobia (plague) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. savage (hackles) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. puppies (badger hole) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. needle (entrails ) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. visitor (dismounted) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. Rose (crumpled-horn cow) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. Rosal (treed) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## OLD YELLER

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each of the following.

1. Mama
2. Lisbeth
3. Miss Prissy
4. Papa
5. Bud Searcy
6. Travis
7. Burn Sanderson
8. Arliss
9. Jumper
10. Old Yeller

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Travis resents being responsible for the ranch while Papa is gone to Abilene.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Little Arliss respects his older brother as a disciplinarian.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Travis immediately recognizes the value of the big, ugly dog.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Old Yeller saves Little Arliss from an enraged mother bear.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Mama allows Old Yeller to sleep with Travis to keep him from stealing food from neighbors.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Burn Sanderson is Old Yeller's rightful owner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Old Yeller is useful as a herder of cows, but shies from javelina hogs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Lisbeth brings a speckled pup that steals food like its father.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Travis knows he must shoot the dog to prevent the spread of rabies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The Coates family ranch lies near Comanche and Apache.

## OLD YELLER

### Part III: Quotation Completion (20 points)

Complete each quotation below with a word or phrase from the list that follows. You will have answers left over when you finish.

baby	cattleman	dog run	hogs	roans
bear	coons	drag	liar	scythe
bulls	cornbread	eggs	nettles	stitchery
castration	cowhide	hackles	poultice	withers

1. He's telling all the other \_\_\_\_\_ that if they've got a lick of sense, they'll take cover when he's around.
2. The kind that make a good \_\_\_\_\_ are the smaller size. They don't have much top, but lots of knotty roots, shaped sort of like sweet potatoes.
3. His \_\_\_\_\_ stood up in a ragged ridge along the back of his neck and shoulders.
4. If Mama wanted Little Arliss to grow up to be the biggest \_\_\_\_\_ in Texas, I guessed it wasn't any of my business.
5. As I raced past them, I saw the \_\_\_\_\_ lunge up to stand on her hind feet like a man while she clawed at the body of the yeller dog hanging to her throat.
6. Then, the next day, I went to rounding up and marking \_\_\_\_\_ and forgot all about the plague.
7. What hurts him is the \_\_\_\_\_, and I never did like that part of the job. But it had to be done, and still does if you want to eat hog meat.
8. And beneath them, down in the clear water, yard-long \_\_\_\_\_ lay on the sandy bottom, waiting to gobble up any young birds that happened to fall out of the nests.
9. She had me tie the \_\_\_\_\_ to Jumper's back and bind the pillows down on top of it.
10. Finally, Mama figured out a way to keep Jumper from jumping. She tied a \_\_\_\_\_ to him.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why Lisbeth brings the pup to Travis.
2. Discuss how Travis and Mama rescue Old Yeller.
3. Describe Travis's grief for his two dogs.
4. Compare the attitudes of Burn, Arliss, and Travis to the ugly yellow dog.
5. Discuss Mama's qualities as a disciplinarian and rancher.

## OLD YELLER

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline the word or phrase which will complete each statement below.

1. Before leaving on the cattle drive, Papa tells Travis that he needs (another dog to replace Bell, a horse to help him herd cattle and hogs, a mesquite switch to discipline Little Arliss, a mule to replace the one that the Apaches stole.)
2. Travis's most important job while his father is in Abilene is (shooting fresh meat, watching over the corn patch, breaking a new milk cow, repairing the split rail fence.)
3. When Travis sees Old Yeller, he (realizes his value at breaking cows, resents him for taking Bell's place, fears his great jaws, kicks at him as hard as he can.)
4. Burn Sanderson trades for (middling meat from the dog run, Rose the milk cow, a side of venison, a home-cooked meal.)
5. Old Yeller and Travis sleep in the corn patch (to keep the dog from sucking eggs, to guard the corn from varmints, because it is cooler than the corn-shuck mattress, because Mama doesn't want the boys to get ring-worm.)
6. Range hogs defend themselves by (forming a tight circle, charging predators with their tusks, running up the creek bed and into the chaparral, finding a den and guarding the entrance.)
7. Old Yeller's job is to (drive the hogs into the corral, force them over a creek bank, rally them in a ring around a tree, wear them out in a long chase through the draw.)
8. When Old Yeller retreats under a sandstone rock, (Mama drives the hogs off, Arliss sobs and begs her to save him, Travis will not leave his dog to die alone, Travis staggers home.)
9. After Travis shoots the roan bull, (he buries the carcass, Mama and Lisbeth collect wood for a fire, Bud butchers the remains, Papa uses Jumper to drag the carcass away from the water supply.)
10. Burn Sanderson advises (Bud to shoot vicious animals, Travis to avoid any animal acting strangely, Arliss to look for loafer wolves, Mama to keep Spot for a milk cow.)

#### Part II: Completion (20 points)

Complete each of the following statements by filling in the blanks.

1. During the cash-poor years of the \_\_\_\_\_, Papa and other cattlemen pool their \_\_\_\_\_ and drive them to the new market at Abilene, Kansas.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ died the previous summer from the bite of the severed head of a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. It is obvious from his paunch that \_\_\_\_\_ has raided the \_\_\_\_\_ and eaten a side of middling meat.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ knows that the varmint Bud describes as eating meat and \_\_\_\_\_ in the neighborhood is Old Yeller.
5. Lisbeth brings one of \_\_\_\_\_'s seven speckled pups, but \_\_\_\_\_ is indifferent to it.

## OLD YELLER

### Part III: Short Answer (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase from the list below in answer to the following questions. You will have answers left over when you finish.

badger	catfish	dog	lizard	roan
barn owl	coon	herons	milk cow	skunk
bulls	copperhead	hogs	mule	squirrels
buzzards	cottontail rabbits	horned toad	possums	swallows
calf	doe	loafer wolves	ringworm	water snakes

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What kind of horse does Papa bring?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What punctures Arliss's hand?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What crashes into the side of the cabin?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What animals does Rosal Simpson spy?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. What does Travis shoot in a sandy spot?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. What does Mama send Arliss to catch?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What refuses to eat eggs?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What runs into a tree?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. What swells up and flattens out like a Mexican tortilla?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. What does Travis treat with turpentine?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. What does Old Yeller catch feeding on corn?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. What causes Old Yeller to drool, wallow, and drag his body through tall weeds?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. What lives in mud on the cliffs?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. What provides hair for sewing up Old Yeller's abdomen?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. In what type of hole were the pups born?

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Select two questions to answer in paragraph form.

1. Explain how Travis marks hogs for identification.
2. Describe the Coates ranch.
3. Discuss Travis's attitude toward protecting his mother and brother.
4. Account for Papa's departure to Abilene.
5. Account for Old Yeller's value to the ranch.

## OLD YELLER

### ANSWER KEY

#### VOCABULARY TEST

Answers will vary.

#### COMPREHENSION TEST A

##### Part I: Identification (20 points)

Answers will vary.

##### Part II: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  |
| 2. F | 7. F  |
| 3. F | 8. T  |
| 4. T | 9. T  |
| 5. F | 10. T |

##### Part III: Quotation Completion (20 points)

- |             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. bulls    | 6. hogs       |
| 2. poultice | 7. castration |
| 3. hackles  | 8. coons      |
| 4. liar     | 9. cowhide    |
| 5. bear     | 10. drag      |

##### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

#### COMPREHENSION TEST B

##### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

1. another dog to replace Bell
2. watching over the corn patch
3. kicks at him as hard as he can
4. a home-cooked meal
5. to guard the corn from varmints
6. forming a tight circle
7. rally them in a ring around a tree
8. Travis staggers home
9. Mama and Lisbeth collect wood for a fire
10. Travis to avoid any animal acting strangely

##### Part II: Completion (20 points)

1. Civil War, herds
2. Bell, rattlesnake
3. Old Yeller, dog run
4. Lisbeth, eggs
5. Miss Prissy, Travis

##### Part III: Short Answer (30 points)

- |            |                |              |
|------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. roan    | 6. lizard      | 11. coon     |
| 2. catfish | 7. dog         | 12. skunk    |
| 3. bulls   | 8. doe         | 13. swallows |
| 4. hogs    | 9. horned toad | 14. mule     |
| 5. calf    | 10. ringworm   | 15. badger   |

##### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



**THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY**

PERMA-BOUND BOOKS • 617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650

Toll Free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169

E-mail: [books@perma-bound.com](mailto:books@perma-bound.com)

PERMA-BOUND CANADA • Box 517, Station A • Willowdale, Ontario M2N 5T1

Toll Free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-888-250-3811

E-mail: [perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca](mailto:perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca)

VISIT OUR WEB SITE: <http://www.perma-bound.com>