

Text Title: *What about Bo?*

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Synopsis

Bo is Jack's father's dog. He is a working dog. He helps to herd the sheep on the farm. The only trouble is Bo only listens to Rob Henderson. And Rob is leaving the farm. Jack's father has been under huge pressure running the farm. He can no longer cope so he leaves Jack, his brother Tim and his mother to run the farm alone. Rob leaves Jack in charge of Bo. Jack realises after a string of incidents involving his dog that Bo is in need of some serious training. With the help of neighbour, Hamish Quigley, Jack makes fantastic progress with Bo, and he and the rest of his family band together to run the farm in their father's absence. But Bo has a bad habit of running away and when he gets into Dan Everett's paddocks, Jack's mother makes the decision to give him away. Jack is heartbroken. He believes that Bo and his father are meant to be together, and that if he can't get Bo back his father will never return home. Jack becomes frustrated with Joe's refusal to sell Bo back to him, so he decides to take matters into his own hands. This is a decision that puts his brother Tim's life in danger.

Text Type

What about Bo? is a New Zealand novel. Many students will find the rural setting and farming practices familiar and easy to relate to. *What about Bo?* is a fast-paced story that would appeal to all readers, but particularly boys. Although the narrative is told from the third person point of view, this is Jack's story. We learn his thoughts and feelings as he struggles to come to terms with his father's departure and learn the skills necessary to run a farm. Jack develops and changes as the story goes on – but one thing remains the same, his love for Bo.

Themes include dealing with the separation of your parents and the possibility of a parent finding a new partner, family issues including banding together to reach a goal and human relationships with animals. Jack's mother Maree is a strong female role-model. She is an independent woman who gathers up her courage and learns new skills in order to run the farm.

Sharing the Novel

The novel can be covered in 4 shared sessions and 3 independent reading sessions. It has been divided up as follows: Chapters 1-2 (pp.7-23), Chapters 3-7 (pp. 24-75), Chapters 8-12 (pp. 76-116), Chapters 13-17 (pp. 117-156).

During the shared sessions encourage students to use a dictionary to look up any words that they are unfamiliar with. Have them ask questions to clarify their understanding of themes and ideas. Discuss the issues raised in the book and track the character development of Jack throughout the story.

Introducing the Text

Study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Why do you think Jack's dad might be leaving?
- Who is Bo?

- What does Jack want to train Bo to help him with?
- Where do you think the story is set?
- Why do you think Bo's life is in danger?
- Devise 3 questions that you would like answered about the novel. As you read find the answers to your questions.

Teacher reads Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 7-23) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapters 1-2 (pp. 7-23)

- Where is the story set?
- How does Rob Henderson treat his son? Why do you think he treats him like this?
- Who is Bo? How did he cut his leg?
- Name Jack's brother. How old is he?
- What fond memories does Jack have about his father on the farm? Why has Rob changed so much?
- Who is Christy Everett? How does Bo embarrass Jack in front of her?
- Why is Jack so pleased when his father gives him Bo to look after?
- What terrible news do Jack and Tim learn about when they return from school? Why is Jack not really surprised by the news? How does he feel about it?
- Why do you think Rob doesn't look at Bo when he leaves?

Discussion

- Is work more important than family? Explain your answer. What are some ways that Rob could have made his life happier?
- What thoughts and feelings does Jack have about his father's departure? How does Maree react? Why does she react like this? What problems could Rob's departure cause the family? Do you think he explained the reasons for leaving adequately to his sons? Why/why not?
- Jack is now in charge of Bo. Is he capable of looking after a working dog – why/why not?

Students read Chapters 3-7 (pp. 24-75) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 3-7 (pp. 24-75)

- Why does Dan Everett visit Maree after dinner? How does Maree react to his offer? Why do you think she reacts this way?
- What problems do Maree and the boys have when they start trying to run the farm?
- Who is Jean Parker? How does she help Maree and the family? Why do you think Maree approaches her rather than one of the men in the area?
- What kind of book does Jack get out of the library?
- Who is Hamish Quigley? In what way is he able to help Jack?
- What does Jack train Bo for? What improvements does Bo make?

- Who is George?
- How does Jack feel when Bo wins the obstacle course? What happens after the event that embarrasses Jack?
- How does Dan Everett react to Bo's display of bad behaviour?
- Maree sticks up for Bo. What does this tell us about her character?
- What responsibilities does Jack have on the farm?
- What does Hamish suggest that Jack do with Bo to improve his behaviour?
- Why do you think Rob hasn't contacted his sons? Where is he living? Why does Jack have so much trouble imagining him there?
- What does Jack learn about Hamish that surprises him?
- How does Jack know that Bo is making progress as a working dog? Why does he leave him untied?
- Who is at Jack's house when he returns from the movies? How does Jack feel about this?

Discussion

- Describe Maree. What sort of person is she? How does she try and make the marriage break-up easier for her sons? What qualities does she have? What are her strengths?
- What is Jack's relationship like with Tim? Do you have any brothers or sisters? How do you get on with them? Can you relate to any of the conflicts that occur between Jack and Tim?
- Why is Jack so disturbed to see Hamish Quigley in his father's chair? Do you think Hamish is hanging around simply to help Jack? Explain your answer.
- Why do you think Dan Everett is at Jack's? What has Bo done? What is going to happen in the story next?

Students read Chapters 8-12 (pp.76-116) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 8-12 (pp. 76-116)

- Why is Dan so furious with Bo? Why do you think Maree agrees to get rid of Bo? Where does Dan want Bo to go?
- How does Jack feel about his mother's decision? Why doesn't he argue with her and try to get her to change her mind?
- What is going to happen to Bo if it doesn't work out with his new owner?
- What does Jack get from his father for Christmas?
- How does Jack begin to earn the money for a pony? Why does Maree agree to let him get one so readily?
- Why does Maree cry in her bedroom?
- How have Maree and the boys improved at running the farm? What does each of them contribute?
- How does Jack react when he sees Bo in the ute? What does Jack believe that Bo wants?
- Why does Jack feel relief and jealousy about Bo?

- What does Jack discover about Bo from Nathan? Why are the Everett children so willing to help him?
- Why does Jack no longer like chocolate cake?
- What does Jack learn about his father from the letter?
- Why is Jack so sure that he needs to get Bo back? How does he convince Tim to help him?
- What does Hamish thank Jack for? What is his opinion of Joe Hancock?
- Describe Jack's first encounter with Joe. Why is Jack concerned about Bo's condition?
- How much money does Jack believe Joe wants for Bo? How much is Jack short?
- Who does he approach for a job?

Discussion

- Do you believe that Maree's decision to give Bo away is a fair one? Why/why not?
- How does Jack react to his mother's friendship with Hamish? Why do you think he reacts like this? Do you believe that it is wrong for Maree to go out with other men? Why/why not?
- How has Jack developed and changed since his father left?
- Describe Joe Hancock. Is he being fair to Jack? Why/why not? How would Bo's life be different living with Joe? What is Joe most concerned about?
- What do you think is going to happen next in the story?

Students read Chapters 13-17 (pp. 117-156) independently before the next shared session.

Chapters 13-17 (pp. 117-156)

- Why is Jack so adamant that Tim accompany him to Joe's? Why does he begin to regret his decision?
- How much money does Jack have for Joe? Why won't Joe accept it? What is one of the main reasons why Joe won't sell Bo back?
- Why does Jack look inside Joe's house? Why is he so concerned about getting caught?
- How does Jack feel when he is able to hug Bo again? Do you think it is right for him to take Bo without permission but leave the money? Justify your answer.
- Why does Tim run out onto the road? What happens to him? How does Jack find him?
- What does Jack do when he finds Tim? How does Bo help look after him? Why does Jack return to the road? Who does he send for help?
- Why won't the ambulance attendants let Bo travel with them? Who takes Bo? What two things is Jack worried about when he accompanies Tim to the hospital?
- Why do you think the police are lenient on Jack? What is Maree's punishment for him?

- What injuries does Tim sustain? Why does Jack feel a little resentful towards him?
- Where is Hamish going? Why does he “think it’s best”?
- Why does Joe agree to sell the dog? Who pays the final \$25? How does Jack feel when he gets Bo back?
- Why is Jack still keen to get a pony?
- Who returns at the end of the story?

Discussion

- Identify the climax of the novel. Why is this point important?
- What are some of the main themes and ideas presented in the story? How are these developed?
- How does Jack show courage when he helps rescue his brother? Do you think their relationship might change from this point on? Explain your answer.
- What lessons does Jack learn from his experiences with Bo and his parents breaking up?
- Do you think that Jack, Tim and Maree will have any difficulties adapting to having Rob home? Explain your answer.

Activities

Plot – Complete a plot graph for *What about Bo?* Label the vertical axis “level of excitement”. List 10 important events in the story on the horizontal axis and in chronological order. Plot each event according to its level of excitement. Remember to clearly label the climax of the story.

Review – Complete a book review for *What about Bo?* Discuss the setting and style of the story. Explain how the main character of Jack develops and discuss issues that are raised in the novel. Remember to include your own personal opinion about the story.

Static Image – Design the 1st place ribbon that Bo wins for the obstacle course.

Web Page – Develop a web page advertising *What about Bo?* Include a brief summary about the book and pictures and graphics that relate to the story. You may wish to include links such as information about the author.

Storyboard – Choose an exciting scene from the novel and develop it into a storyboard.

Writing – Imagine that you are Jack. Complete a diary entry for him on the night that his father left. Remember to comment on events that have occurred and Jack’s thoughts and feelings about them.

Writing – Write the final chapter for the book detailing what happens in Jack’s life after his father returns.

Writing – Write about how Jack’s character develops and changes throughout the novel.