

Dogsong Study Guide

Dogsong by Gary Paulsen

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Plot Summary

Dogsong by Gary Paulsen is the tale of a teenager who finds himself at an important crossroads in his life. Russel Susskit is a fourteen-year-old Eskimo boy who lives with his father. Their summers are spent in a fish-camp, and every winter they move into the village and live in a tiny government-owned house. Russel's father, once a heavy drinker, found religion some years ago after Russel's mother abandoned them and ran off with a white man. Russel does not understand his father's enthusiasm for Jesus, but the boy knows that Jesus helped his father stop drinking and so he accepts it for what it is. Russel's father loves him but he cannot answer Russel's questions about life and living. Nor can Russel's father fully comprehend the boy's restlessness and dissatisfaction.

The cold, forbidding winter days are short and the nights are long in the small village on the tundra. Each morning, Russel is awakened by the sound of his father's coughing and the smell of diesel fuel. For Russel Susskit and the other Eskimos in this out-of-the-way village, every day is the same. Russel is suspicious and distrustful of things and people who come from Outside. The tobacco his father rolls into homemade cigarettes comes from Outside, as do the pictures of Jesus that decorate the walls of his home. Outside represents the white man and the white man's ways. When Russel tries to talk to his father and explain the feelings he is having, his father admits not knowing how to help his son and sends Russel to visit a village elder by the name of Oogruk. Oogruk knows the Old Ways — how the Eskimos lived before the white men came to the far north. Oogruk is a kind of shaman, or holy man. Oogruk is revered in the village as a wise, albeit eccentric, old man with important stories to tell and mysterious songs to sing. Russel is drawn to Oogruk and calls him "Grandfather" out of respect. Russel does not realize that his life and Oogruk's life are intertwined.

Russel's time with Oogruk begins innocently enough. The two talk about the Old Ways and how their people have changed since the songs disappeared. One afternoon when Russel comes out of a trance, his entire perspective changes and Russel embarks on a challenging physical and emotional journey to re-connect with the Old Ways and himself. Russel learns that he is his own song, that the Old Ways are still his ways. With the help and companionship of Oogruk's team of sled dogs, Russel Susskit finally sees the world through the eyes of his geographical and cultural ancestors. Dogsong is about awakening and creating meaning and purpose in life where none existed before.



Part 1, The Trance: Chapters 1 - 5

Part 1, The Trance: Chapters 1 - 5 Summary

Dogsong is the story of a young Eskimo boy who learns the importance of tradition and honoring one's culture. Russel Susskit finds out the true meaning of the songs his elders once sang. Russel turns to Oogruk, an old shaman, for the answers his father cannot provide. Waking life and the dream time come together in Russel and he comes to understand how past, present, and future are connected.

Russel and his father spend the winter months in the government house and the summers in a fish-camp. Russel's father once explained that Jesus died for Russel's sins. Russel does not understand why his father loves Jesus. The pictures of Jesus are all cut from magazines sent to Russel's father by people Outside.

Oogruk the shaman is the only person in the village who owns a team of dogs.

Russel brings in chunks of seal and caribou meat in from the pantry and cooks it on the stove. Russel's father cautions him to cook the meat thoroughly. Russel's father informs him that raw meat contains bugs and other things that could make Russel sick. Russel is having feelings that he does not understand. His father admits to noticing that Russel is not quite himself lately. Russel asks his father what he can do to understand what he is going through. Russel's father usually turns to Jesus to help him sort things out. But, his father says, since Russel does not have a spiritual relationship with Jesus, his father suggests that Russel talk to Oogruk.

Oogruk is an elder and he is highly respected in the village. Russel's father says that Oogruk's words can be difficult to understand but that Oogruk's songs are another matter. Russel agrees to talk to Oogruk. Russel's father then suggests that Russel take two caribou heads to Oogruk because Oogruk "loves the eyes" (p. 11). Russel arrives at Oogruk's house. Russel has been here before but has never been inside. On the way up to the house, Russel can feel Oogruk's dogs watching him. Oogruk lives the old way - he has no electricity and uses a seal-oil lamp. There are caribou skins covering the floor. The skins give off a strong smell.

Russel sits for a short while and chats briefly with the old man. Before long, Oogruk asks Russel about the dogs. Russel tells Oogruk that the dogs are happy and fat because everyone in the village feeds them. Soon, Oogruk asks Russel to bring in the caribou eyes and put them in a pan to warm them. Oogruk admits that he misses having a woman in his home. Oogruk's third wife left for a party and never came back. Russel knows nothing about women. This does not bother him as he knows he is not ready to think about women yet. Russel is only fourteen years old.

Oogruk talks to Russel about a man named Ulgavik who could sing to the birds. Ulgavik, it turns out, also knew quite a lot about sled dogs. The sled dogs became



Ulgavik's eyes in Ulgavik's old age. Russel is not entirely sure why he has come to talk to Oogruk, but Oogruk knows that Russel has come to hear about the old way. Oogruk sends Russel to the food cache to fetch some meat. Oogruk tells Russel that a little warm meat will help his memory. Oogruk then talks to Russel about the old ways before men used guns to hunt with. Oogruk says that before there were guns, animals "felt different about dying" (25).

Oogruk and a few other men founded the village where they live. Oogruk and the other men had had some trouble in their old village, but life improved when they began the new village. Here, there was good meat, good fish, and good songs. This changed when the missionary arrived, though. The missionary told the people that their songs and dances were evil and that if they continued to sing and dance in such a manner, they would all go to hell. Even though the people laughed at the missionary at first, they eventually stopped dancing and singing their songs.

Oogruk explains to Russel that each person has his or her own song. Songs are not something that people just get out of thin air. Oogruk is sad that the new ways do not make room for songs. Russel tells Oogruk that he will become his own song. Oogruk promises to teach Russel the old ways and after their bellies are full and they are warm, Russel falls into a trance and Oogruk begins to talk.

Oogruk tells Russel the story of how their people came to be. In the trance, Russel imagines sitting on a sled looking at a beautiful purple winter flower. Oogruk explains how the land used to look. The land to the north and east of the village was full of rolling hills, tundra grass and land blown free of snow. Ptarmigan and arctic hare were in abundance.

Russel sleeps for awhile after Oogruk finishes talking. When he awakens, Russel knows what he must do. Russel takes off his store-bought modern clothes and puts on a pair of deerskin pants, a squirrel underparka and a deerskin outerparka. He takes lances, bows and arrows down from the wall. Russel could hear Oogruk's thoughts, telling him to take whatever he needs - including the sled and the dogs. After pulling on a squirrelskin innerparka and a pair of sealskin mukluks, Russel steps out into the cold. There are only three hours of dark-daylight left and Russel knows that he must work quickly.

Once outside, Russel checks the dog harnesses and bridles and prepares the sled. At first, the lead dog is uncooperative, but Russel challenges him by biting him on the nose. The rest of the dogs follow suit and soon Russel and the team are on their way. Russel has never driven a team of dogs before, but he instinctively knows what to do.

At first, the dogs run helter-skelter, uncertain of what to do since they have not run with a sled in two years. Russel realizes that he and the dogs will have to get used to working as a team. Russel gives the dogs direction but the lead dog is already in command and Russel and the team make it back to Oogruk's house without a problem.

The old man instructs Russel to fetch more meat for them to eat but to feed the dogs first. Oogruk then tells Russel that he must go out and hunt for more meat using the Old



Way. After the two of them eat and sleep, Russel harnesses the dogs and goes in search of ptarmigan.

When Russel sees a flock of ptarmigan, he loads a bird arrow into the bow. Several times, he aims at the birds and misses. Finally, Russel hears Oogruk's voice telling him to aim at the center of the center of where he wants the arrow to go. Russel takes aim once again and manages to kill one of the birds. As instructed, he removes the head and laces a small amount of food in the bird's mouth and thanks the animal for its meat.

Russel knows that it is getting dark, but he decides to run the dogs for a short while longer. Soon, Russel spots a caribou standing very still, watching him. He loads another arrow into the bow, takes aim and kills the caribou. After feeding the liver to the dogs, he cuts off the caribou's head and places food in its mouth. On his way into the village, Russel experiences something he has never felt before. It is as if he, the dogs, and the sled have become one unit. Russel hears words in his head and realizes that he is becoming his own song.

Chapter four opens with an Eskimo remembering what was said about the early Russian hunters. The Russians mistreated the Eskimos, took their pelts, took their women and used the Eskimo men "as beasts" (p. 51).

Russel takes the dog team out once again. He is going in search of a seal. Russel decides to hunt with a harpoon. He will wait for a seal to come up through a hole in the ice. Twenty miles from the village, a storm blows in. Russel uses the sled and the dog team to protect himself from the cold and snow. When the storm ends, Russel and the dogs make their way back to the village.

After awhile, Russel realizes that he is lost. Russel remembers that at one point the dogs hesitated. Russel would not let them run their way; he insisted that the dogs run where he wanted them to run. When the ice shifts, Russel becomes afraid and decides to let the dogs find their own way home.

In chapter five, everyone in the village knows that Russel is living with Oogruk now and learning the old ways. Russel does not go to school anymore and no one expects him to. They know that Russel is learning important things on his own. Russel's father does not complain.

One day, Russel again decides to go out onto the ice to hunt for seal. Until now, he has only caught rabbits and ptarmigan and one caribou. Oogruk enjoys the rabbit and ptarmigan, but Russel knows that the dogs need red meat, blood and fat or they will not be able to run. Oogruk tells Russel that he will go out onto the ice as well. Russel settles the old man onto the sled and they leave the village. When they reach a suitable hunting spot, Oogruk tells Russel that he will leave Russel very soon. Russel is confused by this and asks the old man to explain. Oogruk tells Russel that his time has come and tells Russel to continue on without him.

Russel tries to argue with Oogruk but the old man will not be persuaded to accompany Russel any further. Oogruk tells Russel that he must not return to the village. He says



that Russel must go out and hunt and see the country for a time - no one can say how long. At first Russel is resistant, but he comes around and drives the dogs further away from the village.

Part 1, The Trance: Chapters 1 - 5 Analysis

This first group of chapters deals primarily with Russel Suskit's background. Not much is known about Russel's family except that his father is a former alcoholic and his mother abandoned them some years prior to the beginning of the novel.

The title "The Trance" refers not only to the trance into which Russel falls while listening to Oogruk's stories. It applies to the life that Russel lives before going to Oogruk for help. That is to say, Russel Suskit is in a trance brought on by his sense of disconnectedness — from his people, his father, and by extension, disconnection from himself.

The opening chapters reveal a restlessness within Russel that the boy struggles to articulate. Russel and his father do not seem to have a very close relationship, although one assumes that the two have some love for one another. Russel's father seems to be a man who simply allows life to happen to him. He is portrayed as a passive person who relies heavily on his belief in Jesus to get him through the more difficult things in life. Russel understands that his father's faith is not his own faith. Also, it is important to remember that the pictures of Jesus which decorate Russel's house were sent to his father by (white) people from Outside. That is to say, Russel's father did not make or buy the pictures himself. Therefore, Russel's father's choice to follow Jesus is not something which comes naturally to him. In a way, Russel views his father's belief in Jesus and Christianity in general as a kind of betrayal. However, Russel does not begrudge his father's faith. Russel simply acknowledges that his father's faith is not for him.

In chapter one, Russel's anxiety is mostly aimed at things which originate Outside. Outside refers to the world outside of Russel's Eskimo village. It is clear that things from Outside have been allowed to influence the others in the small government village — including Russel for a short time. When the novel begins, it is clear to see that Russel's life is an interesting mix of old and new traditions. For example, the men in the village hunt for food using snowmobiles rather than teams of sled dogs. Also, Russel's father's attachment to Christianity and the Outside tobacco also represent the way in which the ways of white people penetrate their current lives. Russel's father's assertion that eating raw meat can be harmful is a decidedly Western view. The only person in the village who keeps strictly to the Old Ways is Oogruk, one of the elders of the village.

The feeling of comfort that Russel experiences when he spends time with Oogruk is an indication that Russel has begun the journey of discovery which will lead him out of his confusion and anxiety. However, before moving forward, Russel must hear from Oogruk about the way things were before Russel (and even Russel's father) was born.



Oogruk's stories give Russel a sense of history. Without a sense of where a person has been, it is difficult for that person to determine where s/he wants to go. In this way, Russel's past comes as a welcome surprise to the young boy. Russel's father is aware that he is not equipped to teach Russel the Old Ways because his father is equally disconnected from his Eskimo traditions. The ease with which Russel falls into a trance signals his readiness to learn about and practice the old Eskimo ways.

The most important part of Russel's informal education is his experience with the sled dogs. Oogruk is the only person in the village who owns sled dogs. This is just one indication that the people have lost touch with their Eskimo identity. Oogruk's story of how he came to found the village proves that sled dogs are a part of the Eskimo's cultural tradition. Since there were no "snowmachines" during Oogruk's day, using sled dogs was the only efficient means of transporting people and materials from place to place.

Another important factor which comes to light in these early chapters is the matter of the Eskimos' songs and dances. The influence of a missionary over the Eskimos was enough to cause the Eskimos in Russel's region to give up a vital part of who they were. Like stories handed down from generation to generation, the songs and dances allowed the people to express themselves and to celebrate their way of life. Giving up singing and dancing is the same as living without sled dogs. The fact that the people willingly gave up these parts of themselves is the source of Oogruk's sadness. Also, living without songs, dances, and dogs means that Russel Susskit and others like him are only living half-lives.

Russel's first experience driving the dog team symbolizes the boy's uneasiness with his own culture. At first, Russel is insecure and nervous because he has not been exposed to dogs like these. Russel learns a lesson in trust from the dogs. In order for the dogs to do what they are trained to do, Russel must believe that the dogs are his allies and not his adversaries.

Hunting in the wilds is another completely new experience for Russel Susskit. Using the bow and arrow or the killing lance puts Russel in touch with the true nature of hunting for food. Russel learns to see the hunted animals as beings who willingly give up their lives so that the Eskimos can be fed. Thanking a hunted animal for its meat, Russel learns that all life is sacred and that no matter how small, each animal has a purpose in this world.

Once Oogruk is confident that Russel will learn and carry on the Old Ways, the old man feels a sense of relief and he dies a peaceful death. Although Oogruk's death is difficult for Russel to deal with on an emotional level, Russel also understands that the Old Ways are part of him now and that there will be no turning back.



Part Two, The Dreamrun: Chapters 6 - 14

Part Two, The Dreamrun: Chapters 6 - 14 Summary

In chapter six, Russel leaves Oogruk and heads out into the frozen wilderness. Russel sees the beauty around him in nature. The colors in the sky give Russel a feeling of wonder and comfort. Noticing that the lead dog has begun to weave, Russel stops and lets the team rest. He gives each of them a piece of meat from a deer leg, but the dogs are so exhausted that they fall asleep immediately. The thought of being one hundred fifty miles from anywhere familiar begins to frighten him.

The next morning, Russel wakes the dogs and they set out again. They travel north into unfamiliar territory. Russel can see that the dogs are losing weight and know that if they do not have meat soon they will all die. Russel surveys the landscape and decides that there will be plenty of food to hunt for in the hills. Russel knows that there are rabbits, ptarmigan, foxes and lemmings nearby. Russel and the dogs happen on a herd of several hundred caribou. Russel jumps off the sled and pulls arrows from his quiver.

The dogs give chase and take down one of the caribou by themselves. Russel kills two more with his arrows. Altogether, Russel kills four caribou. He makes camp and finishes cutting up the caribou carcasses. He gives the dogs shoulder meat and warms tenderloin for himself. Russel feels as though he has made a home - as much of a home as his people had in the old time. Russel feels content and warm. With a full belly, he sleeps deeply and dreams.

In chapter seven, Russel's dream begins with a vision of swirling fog through which he can see a shelter made of skins on a shore. An oil lamp burns inside the shelter.

Russel sees two children in the shelter. Their round faces shine in the lamplight. A woman tends the lamp. She, too, is fat and "shiny beautiful" as she tends the lamp and gazes upon her children. The woman's face and her children's faces are slick with the fat from the meat they have eaten. Russel does not recognize the meat but knows that the meat is somehow very important. There is a man in the shelter as well but he stays toward the back and Russel cannot quite make out his face. The man rises and prepares to leave the shelter. Russel sees worry and fear in the woman's eyes. He senses the man's fear but the man does not reveal that he, too, is afraid.

All of a sudden, Russel and the man are outside. The man finds his team of dogs harnessed and ready to leave. Russel admires the man's sled. It is fine-looking and well-made. The sled, made from fine bone and ivory, "shone yellow white and rich in the night light" (p. 94). Russel can tell that the dogs are not like Oogruk's dogs. These dogs are bigger than Oogruk's dogs and they stand level with the man's waist. The dogs all have yellow eyes. Russel can see that the dogs would just as soon eat the man as pull his sled, but he also senses that the large gray dogs are a loyal and fearless team.



In silence, the dogs pull the sled into the night, into a swirl of fog. They are going on a hunt. Russel watches as the man and his wolf-dogs discover their prey. Russel can see that the man and his dogs are all afraid. The animal tracks they come upon are huge, but Russel does not know what kind of animal it might be.

Out of the fog, the animal emerges. Russel sees before him a massive woolly mammoth. Russel knows that this will be a fight to the death. While the man prepares to slay the mammoth with a killing-lance, his parka hood is blown off and Russel sees that the man in the dream is he, himself. Russel's dream self is older, more mature.

The mammoth charges and the man spears the great beast in the center of its chest. This angers the mammoth and the mammoth catches two dogs and sends them flying through the air. Suddenly, the mammoth stops in its tracks. The animal lumbers, then falls to the ground and dies.

Russel watches the man as the man begins to sing. The man sings out of elation and gratitude. Russel does not understand the words being sung, but Russel knows that the words are his own. The man sings the wind and a song of praise for the powerful animal which provides meat and fat for his family. Somehow Russel knows that the songs are his own and he feels happy inside for the first time in a long time.

In chapter eight, Russel awakens from the first dream to find that the dogs had fought amongst themselves. Still, the damage is minimal and he repairs the gang line with ease. Russel then loads the caribou carcasses and skins onto the seat and he and Oogruk's dogs continue their journey north. Russel feels that this day is somehow different. The dogs are different as well. Somehow Oogruk's dogs are now more than dogs. Russel believes that the dogs know what he is thinking. He wonders if the dogs truly know him so well as to read his mind. The dogs instinctively know to run north. Russel lets the dogs run and does not make any effort to alter their course.

After running the team for roughly six hours, the dogs come to a stop at a place which provides perfect shelter for themselves and Russel. Sensing an approaching storm, Russel builds a fire and feeds the dogs then himself. There is plenty of caribou to eat and plenty of fat for the lamp Russel lights in the shelter. While he is lying down, Russel feels something under his shoulder. What first appears to be nothing more than a smooth and shiny black rock is actually a lamp someone carved and left there at the shelter spot. Russel cleans the lamp and fashions a candle wick out to moss, fat, and twigs. Russel thinks the old lamp was carved even before Oogruk's time.

Russel thinks of Oogruk with affection. He knows that the old man would approve of his journey and the way he handles the dog team. Russel feels a genuine sense of well-being and comfort knowing that he is a man now and perfectly capable of providing for himself using what the land gives him.

In chapter nine, Russel falls asleep in the warm shelter with a full belly and a smile on his face. The dream continues and Russel sees a small tent village on a shore. The man and his wolf-dogs stand on a bluff overlooking the village. The village looks



pleasant to Russel. There are racks of fat meat next to each tent and children play outside with fat, happy puppies. The small village seems prosperous.

Russel senses that the man feels sad and misses his wife and children. The man hesitates to enter the village, but his wolf-dogs become excited at the thought of more food and they run wildly into the center of camp. The man recognizes the people in the village' knows them as his own, even though he is a stranger from a place far away. The people welcome the man and his wolf-dogs happily. They know that the man is a great hunter because of all the meat he brings with him. The people celebrate the man's arrival with feasting, dancing and singing. Russel, however, can still feel the sadness in the man's heart.

Suddenly, Russel finds himself in a large tent lit by smoky oil lamps. It is the council tent and all the people are gathered there. The sad man is there as well. Russel looks at the man and is overwhelmed at the sight of the man's body. The man takes his strength from the ground and from all that the land provides from him. The man is part of the land, and the dogs are an extension of the man. The man then stands and begins to dance the story of hunting the great woolly mammoth. For a time, the man becomes the raging mammoth, knowing that he must die to provide food and fat for the man and his dogs.

As the man dances, Russel watches in amazement at the power and the anger the man conveys. The man begins to sing the mammoth's death song and his own song of triumph and gratitude. As the man re-enacts the kill, the village people in the council tent all watch in wonderment at the beauty of the mammoth's self sacrifice. When the man finishes singing and dancing his story, the people scream for joy.

In chapter ten, Russel and the dogs sleep through the storm. When they awaken, it is daylight once again. Russel and the dogs slept for two days. After tying weapons, skins and meat to the sled, Russel calls up the dogs and the trek northward continues. Russel runs the dogs for nearly two days straight. The land becomes flat and treeless. Russel contemplates heading in the direction of the sea but decides to allow the dogs to set the course.

In school, Russel saw maps of the region that indicated a place where the sea comes back to the land. Russel decides that it does not matter. He imagines old, blind Oogruk telling him that the journey is more important than the destination. Russel's eyes begin to bother him and he feels the onset of snow blindness. He has no way to protect his eyes from the snow reflection.

When daylight comes again, Russel notices snowmobile tracks. The dogs run in the snowmobile tracks and Russel wonders where the tracks will lead. There are no villages nearby that he can see. Russel almost becomes excited at the thought of meeting another person out here in the frozen wilderness. Russel then remembers that there is a village some three hundred miles up the coast from where he once lived with his father. He allows the dogs to continue running north. Russel knows that the dogs are strong and have fresh meat in their bellies and that they are not interested in stopping.



Russel begins to hallucinate that someone else is riding on the sled with him. He imagines seeing light on the dogs' feet. Finally, he imagines that the opening of his hood is a mirror, causing Russel to think that everything in front of him is somehow in back of him. While traveling through another dark night, Russel dreams again. This time, though, the dream is much darker.

In chapter eleven, in his dream, Russel once again sees the man driving his wolf-dogs over the ice. The man has left the friendly coastal village of fat children and fat puppies. He has left the village too late and Russel knows this. The man drives his dog team through a brutal storm. The dogs are covered in ice and the fierce wind blows the dogs sideways, pulling them and pushing them at will. Russel senses the man's growing fear and worry. The man whips the dogs and yells at them but is no use. The storm is too powerful.

Russel then sees the tent where the man's wife and children wait for him to return with food for them to eat and fat for the oil lamps to warm them. The women and children are on the verge of starvation. There is no food left and the lamp has nearly run out of fat. The two children sleep side by side and their mother agonizes that her husband has not yet returned. They are thin, painfully thin. They have eaten all the skin that was available to them. They ate their clothing and the soles of their mukluks. They even ate their mittens. The woman considers eating their tent made of skin, but she knows that without protection she and the children would surely die.

In chapter twelve, Russel comes upon the snowmachine but does not meet anyone. He feels the snowmobile - it is cold. He checks to find out if there is fuel and discovers that it is out of gas. Russel cannot imagine why anyone would be this far from civilization without bringing gas and supplies. Russel notices footprints leading away from the snowmobile and runs the dogs, allowing them to follow the quickly disappearing scent. Russel sees that the footprints are small and thinks that they are probably the footprints of a woman.

The dogs had been running for two solid days, but Russel is more interested in finding the person who was riding the snowmobile. Another storm is heading his way. The wind comes up, threatening to waylay the dogs, but Russel presses on. At one point, the dogs stop, refusing to take another step. Russel knows that it is no use trying to get the dogs to continue on. He knows that he must set up sort of protection against the storm.

He climbs off the sled and notices that the dogs have stopped right next to a person lying unconscious on the ground. Russel uses the sled, the dogs and the caribou skins to fashion a lean-to to keep out the wind and snow. Once inside the lean-to, Russel sees that the unconscious person is a pregnant woman. Russel fears that the woman may be close to death. He rubs fat from the lamp on the woman's blue lips. Russel understands that when the woman revives, she will experience a great deal of pain. Returning from half-dead and freezing is always painful. Russel waits for the woman to come back. He warms meat and eats it then falls asleep sitting up.



In chapter thirteen, Russel's dream comes to an end in this chapter. The man drives the wolf-dogs through howling wind and blinding snow. One of the dogs freezes in its sleep and the man kills the dog with his lance to put the dog out of its misery. He loads the carcass onto his bone and ivory sled and presses on. Russel sees that the woman and children have died and been eaten by wolves and foxes. The animals left only two bones uneaten. The woman and her children starved to death waiting for the man to return. Their tent made of skins is nothing now but tatters flapping in the wind. Russel again realizes that he is the man in the dream.

Russel wakes up with the awareness "that there was not a line any longer between the dream and the run" (p. 144). He then recognizes the young pregnant woman in his shelter as the woman from his dream.

In chapter fourteen, Russel and his dogs become one mind, one body. The pregnant woman's name is Nancy. Nancy tells Russel that she became pregnant out of wedlock. The missionaries in Nancy's village convinced her that being unmarried and pregnant is a sin, so Nancy chose to leave her village. She started out on the snowmobile but ran out of gas. Nancy tells Russel that she left the snowmobile and began walking because she did not want anyone to find her body.

Nancy asks Russel to take her north with him. Russel is unsure whether he wants Nancy with him, but he knows he cannot leave a pregnant woman in the wilderness alone. He agrees to take Nancy north. They travel for seven days before they run out of food. Russel then decides to leave Nancy in the shelter and he takes the dogs out to hunt for food. He knows he must hunt or he, Nancy and the dogs will surely starve to death. Just like his dream self, Russel promises Nancy that he will return.

Russel drives the dogs to exhaustion. It has been days and Russel can find nothing to hunt. There are no foxes or rabbits or birds. Russel knows that time will soon run out for all of them if he does not find meat and fat.

On the verge of collapse, Russel thinks he sees large tracks in the snow. He tells himself that he is dreaming, but the tracks do not disappear. Russel continues to follow the huge tracks. The dogs smell meat. Anticipation and excitement carry the dogs forward. Finally, Russel stops and frees one of the dogs from its harness. The dog runs away, still following the trail of scent. The tracks were made by a mature male polar bear. When Russel comes upon the bear, the dog is attempting to distract it long enough for Russel to arrive with his sharp-pointed lance. This angers the bear, and in seconds, the bear bites the dog, snapping its spine. The bear tosses the dog aside like a toy.

Russel releases the remaining dogs from their harnesses and the dogs charge after the polar bear. The bear, however, sets its sights on Russel. The dogs set upon the polar bear and drive it right into Russel's path. Russel kills the bear and thanks it for the meat. The bear carcass is too large to fit on the sled, so Russel cuts away as much meat as possible and turns the team back toward Nancy and the lean-to shelter.



By the time Russel returns to the shelter, the lamp has gone out and Nancy is barely conscious. Russel feeds Nancy fresh bear meat, but she barely responds. Russel begins to worry. Russel falls asleep and half-dreams. Somehow, he hears Nancy moving around and making strange sounds. When Nancy screams, Russel wakes up to find that Nancy has given birth to a stillborn child. Nancy asks Russel to take the baby outside, and Russel does.

Nancy continues to be unwell and Russel decides to get Nancy to a doctor right away. Rather than turning around and trying to get back to his village or Nancy's village, Russel decides to continue north toward the coast. This is the first time Russel wishes he had never left his home village. They return to the bear carcass to stock upon meat and then Russel drives the team in the direction of the coastal villages.

Part Two, The Dreamrun: Chapters 6 - 14 Analysis

The chapters in this section are alternately titled "The Dream" and "The Run". The purpose of this technique is to signal to the reader that Russel's dreams and his actual life are in the process of integration. By the end of Part Two, there is little difference between Russel's waking life and the experiences he has while dreaming.

Russel's journey north brings a series of revelations which challenge Russel's notions of home and safety. Being so far from the government village is at first frightening to him, but Russel learns to trust the dogs and himself in the forbidding environment.

Chapter seven is pivotal because it is here that Russel meets his future self by way of a dream. And while Russel observes himself as a mature man with a wife and family, he still has no idea that his dream will eventually become his reality, both figuratively and literally.

The man's team of wolf-dogs represent the future relationship that Russel will have with Oogruk's dogs. In his future life, Oogruk's dogs will not necessarily take on the physical characteristics of the dogs his dream, but the spirit of the dream dogs will come to resemble the spirit in the team that Oogruk leaves to Russel.

The swirls of fog that Russel encounters in the dream represent Russel's confusion and sense of disconnection.

The dream self's encounter with the woolly mammoth is significant for various reasons. First of all, the man's triumph over the great beast is representative of Russel's victory over his own fear and insecurity. Secondly, the mammoth symbolizes those forces and energies which threaten the Old Ways. Finally, the mammoth's death is emblematic of the power that Russel will realize once the confrontation has come to an end. The incident in which Russel's dream-self kills the mammoth is a foreshadowing of the episode in which Russel kills the mature male polar bear in chapter fourteen.

Russel's realization that Oogruk's dogs are somehow different is indicative of his closeness with the team. Somehow, the dogs are impacted by Russel's dream as well.



Russel's discovery of the old carved lamp represents the insistence of the Old Ways. That is to say, the Old Ways act upon Russel in a manner which cannot be ignored. Russel's choice to use the lamp in the same way his ancestors did means that Russel is prepared to further accept the Old Ways and to make them his own.

The feeling of nostalgia that Russel has when he remembers his friend Oogruk signifies the young man's readiness to carry the traditions into the next phase of his life. This also means that Russel is now a keeper of tradition and culture.

In chapter nine, when Russel witnesses his dream-self singing and dancing, he comes one step closer to what will become his own song. His awe at the man's performance signals that Russel is not entirely ready to claim the song as his own.

Russel's discovery of snowmobile tracks in chapter ten alerts the reader that the journey north is about to take a new direction. The tracks symbolize the ways of the Outside and although Russel is suspicious of the presence of the snowmobile tracks, he is nonetheless curious about their origin. Russel's excitement at the prospect of meeting another person (or persons) proves that he has not fully accepted the need for solitude. At this point, Russel is thinking in terms of the destination rather than the journey, which is counter to the advice that Oogruk gives him.

The hallucination which takes place in chapter ten is another signal that Russel is in the throes of personal transformation. The mirror symbolizes a duality which exists between Russel's past and his future. Russel's present is a jumping off point. That is to say, Russel's present is simply a bridge between past and future.

When Russel encounters Nancy, the dream and Russel's waking life come closer to merging permanently. Russel does not know what to make of Nancy, but he soon realizes that her presence in his life is somehow significant. Nancy's admission that she left her home village out of shame brought on by the condemnation of a missionary identifies Nancy as another character who has succumbed to the ways of the Outside. Nancy's association with Russel proves to be her redemption. Also, by taking responsibility for Nancy and her unborn baby, Russel once again solidifies his role as the keeper of culture and tradition. It is a given that any children born to Russel and Nancy in the future will be educated in the Old Way, the proper Eskimo way.

Russel's encounter with the polar fulfills the foreshadowing provided by the dream-self's killing of the woolly mammoth in a previous chapter.

The dream and Russel's waking life finally converge when Russel manages to reach the shelter while Nancy is still alive. The stillborn child symbolizes the death of Russel and Nancy's past lives and the arrival of their life together. Had the baby been born alive, the story would have been complicated by the presence of a child produced during a period of disconnect in Nancy's life.

Essentially, the narrative proper ends in chapter thirteen. The author does not provide a typical ending to the story. Russel and Nancy's future is still uncertain in concrete terms.

What is known, however, is that Russel's dream life is now the life he fully inhabits. That is to say, Russel becomes the man he was always meant to be.



Part Three: Dogsong

Part Three: Dogsong Summary

Russel's song is complete. His journey out and back again has brought him full circle. Russel finally has his own song. The song solidifies Russel's entrance into manhood and his acceptance and love of the Old Ways.

The song begins: "Come, see my dogs. They carry me / into all things, all things I will be; / all things that will come to me / will come to my dogs" (p. 175). The song tells of Russel and the dogs being one unit, one person. Russel's song is one of reclamation of his true self and respect for Eskimo traditions. The dogs that once ran only for Oogruk now run only for Russel. They are as much a part of him as he is of them and Oogruk.

The song that Russel sings mirrors the song that his dream-self sings in a previous chapter. At this point, Russel has "earned" the right to sing about his life and its challenges. He emerges as a full-grown man, with his history and priorities intact. Russel finally views himself as belonging to something greater than he can comprehend.

Part Three: Dogsong Analysis

Part Three is the shortest of the three sections of this narrative. No narrative action takes place in Part Three. The song that Russel Susskit sings is his own song.

The Dogsong is a song of totality and completion. Russel's words indicate a man who has come to appreciate his place in the grand scheme of things. Interestingly, Russel sees himself as inextricably linked to the dog team. The dogs that once belonged to old Oogruk now belong to Russel. Ultimately, the dogs provide the key to Russel's questions. It is through the adventure with the dogs that Russel is able to "stand on the earth and [...] sing" (p. 176).

Part of the song represents remembrance. In one stanza, Russel says, "I sing of my hunts / and of Oogruk" (p. 177). By honoring Oogruk in his song, Russel lets the reader know that he is aware that his journey is a continuation of Oogruk's journey and a continuation of his Eskimo ancestors' lives.

Russel also comes to understand that without the dogs in his life, he would have no life of his own. He says, "I was nothing before [the dogs], / no man / and no wife. / Without them, no life, / no girl-woman breathing / no song" (p. 176). Russel Susskit leaves behind the smallness of life in the government village, with its snowmobiles and activity room, and he steps out into what is essentially the unknown.

The Dogsong is a song of celebration of life and the oneness that Russel feels with the team. Russel takes no credit for becoming his authentic self. Instead, he gives the credit



to Oogruk's (now his) dogs. He sings of the dogs as he would sing of a loyal and true friend. What is clear is that the dogs somehow "chose" Russel before he chose them to be his close companions.

Russel understands that he is at a loss without the dog team. In the final stanza, he says, "Out before me they go [...] / before me they curve / [...] before me / they go, I go, we go. They are me" (p. 177). By acknowledging that his destiny and the team's destiny are one and the same, Russel ensures that his future will be one spent on solid, if unknown, ground.



Characters

Russel Susskit

Russel Susskit is an Eskimo boy who lives with his father in a small government village in the arctic north. When the novel opens, Russel is approximately fourteen years old. The narrative gives no indication of how old Russel is when the story ends. Russel does not talk about his mother, who ran away with a white man some years before the story begins. In the beginning, Russel feels restless and angry, although he is not sure where these feelings come from. Like the other children, Russel spends the summers in a fish-camp and the winters in a small house located in a government village. Russel does not like the fact that his father smokes and he does not understand his father's fascination with Jesus. Russel does know that something is missing from his life, but he is not certain of how to go about finding the answers to his anxiety.

Russel visits Oogruk, the village shaman, and his life changes. Russel does not trust things that come from Outside. That is to say, Russel is suspicious of anything that comes from white men or white culture. Russel feels that the traditional Eskimo way is the way he is meant to live and he goes in search of his own truth. Russel begins the novel confused and somewhat frightened, but his journey north teaches him that he is capable of being true to his culture while living in the modern world. Russel learns to run a team of dogs and how to live off the land. For Russel, the lesson is trusting that the Old Way is still the most effective. Russel does not wish to turn his back on what is modern, he simply wishes to become more connected to his Eskimo history and authentic Eskimo culture. For Russel, getting in touch with nature and paying attention to dreams are the things which can bring a person back from darkness and doubt.

Mr. Susskit

Russel Susskit's father is never mentioned by name. Russel's father is nondescript and his age is never revealed in the narrative. What is known about Russel's father is that his wife abandoned him for a white trapper and that he is a heavy smoker. Russel's father also believes in Jesus. This is different from saying that Russel's father is a Christian, as the novel gives no indication that Mr. Susskit actually practices the religion. Nevertheless, Russel's father is a man of some faith. His belief in Jesus is what enables Russel's father to stop drinking. When it comes to his son, however, Mr. Susskit is at a complete loss. He does not know how to help Russel and he admits this to his son. Russel's father is disconnected from the Old Ways and as a result he has become disconnected from himself. Russel's father is powerless. To him, the old Ways are a distant memory, but he does not stand in Russel's way when the time comes for Russel to learn about his Eskimo origins. In a way, Russel Susskit's father represents the individual who does not know where he comes from and therefore cannot say where he is headed in life. Russel's father seems to settle for things the way they are. It is no



wonder that Russel hungers for something more than his father can provide. Mr. Susskit represents the New Way of living.

Oogruk

Oogruk is an elder in the government village. He is also one of the founders of the village that Russel and his father live in. Oogruk lives according to the traditional Eskimo ways. He does not set much store by the new way of doing things. Oogruk is a shaman, a kind of holy man and it is his wisdom which helps Russel find himself again. Oogruk is the keeper of stories and the village's connection to the Old Way. At one time, Oogruk hunted with his dog team but now that he is elderly and blind, he no longer takes the dogs out to run. Oogruk is aware of the mistakes his people have made and yet he is willing to share his wisdom with anyone who will listen. The other people in the village honor Oogruk by bringing him food and fat for his oils. Oogruk is blind and very near death. And whereas Russel has much to learn, Oogruk does not die until he has imparted his knowledge to Russel. When he is sure that Russel can find his own way, Oogruk feels safe enough to die. Oogruk is not sentimental about the Old Ways because he realizes that the Old Ways belong to everyone, not just a select few. He also knows that the Old Ways cannot be forced onto those who do not want to know. Oogruk tells Russel the stories of the Old Ways, and in doing so, the old man meets his obligation to his culture. With Russel to continue running the dogs, Oogruk insures that the culture and traditions of the Eskimo people will live on.

Nancy

Nancy is another character who straddles the Old and New Ways. She is also the fulfillment of Russel's dream. Nancy represents Russel's future as a man and a provider. Nancy is probably around the same age as Russel. Perhaps she is in her late teens or early twenties. Nothing is known of Nancy's past or her home village. What is known is that Nancy is convinced of her sin by a Christian missionary and she leaves her home as a result of shame. Nancy delivers a stillborn baby when she is in the shelter waiting for Russel to return with food. Physically, Nancy is round and beautiful. She and Russel together represent the rebirth of the Old Way. She is the female half of the traditional Eskimo self, and with Russel, Nancy finds completion. Like Russel's father, Nancy comes to the narrative as a character who is unaware of her cultural past and its importance in her life. Unlike Mr. Susskit, however, Nancy comes to understand her role as part of Russel's partner and helpmate.



Objects/Places

Mukluks

Mukluks are boots made of fur and animal hide.

Snowmachine

Snowmachine is another name for a snowmobile.

Caribou

Caribou are also known as reindeer. Caribou are most often found in cold northern locations.

Tundra

Tundra is an area identified by its permanently frozen soil and its treeless appearance.

Shaman

A shaman is a holy person, revered by indigenous tribes. A shaman is most often an elderly man or woman who is familiar with a tribe's history and traditions.

Parka

A parka is a heavy jacket with a hood. Parkas are often made from fur or animal skin.

Mammoth

A mammoth is an extinct animal which closely resembles an elephant.

Below World

Below world is another term for hell.

Hummock

A hummock is a small, rounded hill.

Toboggan

A toboggan is a kind of sled.



Themes

Cultural Disconnection

At the beginning of the novel, it is clear that Russel Susskit is struggling with something. The first indication of this struggle is Russel's discomfort when he hears his father coughing each morning. Russel's father is a heavy smoker, and it is his father's cigarette smoking which causes the man to cough. Russel's father smokes Prince Albert tobacco, which he rolls into cigarettes. The tobacco and its effect on his father produces distrust in Russel for things which come from Outside. To Russel, Outside is the world, culture, traditions and customs of people who are not Eskimo. In addition, the smell of diesel oil also represents Outside to Russel. Traditionally, Eskimos would use animal fat to keep their lamps burning and to give them heat. Finally, the sound of the "snowmachines" (snowmobiles) reminds Russel of Outside as well. Furthermore, Russel's father's attachment to Jesus is puzzling to the boy. Russel has difficulty understanding Outside religion but he accepts that it serves a purpose in his father's life. Hence, Russel is disconnected from his own father as well.

Russel does not recognize it at first, but what he is experiencing is a feeling of disconnection from his Eskimo culture and traditions. When Russel goes to the elder Oogruk for guidance and advice, the pieces of his frustration all fall into place. Russel's cultural legacy is so powerful that it calls to him even before the young boy is ready to hear it.

When he begins his friendship with Oogruk, Russel becomes aware of a different way of life than what he sees around him in the government village. When the Eskimos lived according to the Old Way, they hunted with bow and arrow and sharp hunting tools like lances and harpoons. They hunted using teams of dogs and sleds. In the government village, no one uses the Old Way anymore — they watch television or play board games to pass the long winter nights and there is no singing or dancing. Russel's feeling of disconnection forces him to look at what his life has become and by extension he must look at how Eskimos live their lives in the modern world.

When he takes Oogruk's dogs out for the first time, Russel knows that he has much to learn. Russel knows that it is important for him to learn where he comes from and his tenacity enables him to break through his fear of the unknown. The most important thing Russel learns is that each person is responsible for living his or her own authentic life.

Western Religion

Western religion is represented in the novel by the pictures of Jesus which hang on the walls of Russel's home. Jesus is not a part of the Eskimo Old Way and as such, Russel has a hard time identifying with his father's attachment to something so foreign. Russel knows within himself that the Jesus his father worships is part of the Outside. His



father's reliance on non-Eskimo teachings is confusing to Russel but he does not judge his father for believing in Jesus. After all, Jesus helped Russel's father to stop drinking. In the novel, Christianity is portrayed as something invasive and oppressive to the Eskimos. The Eskimos did not ask to be converted to Christianity. Missionaries took it upon themselves to Christianize the Eskimos and in doing so, the missionaries managed to convince the Eskimos to give up part of their identity.

In chapter two, Oogruk tells Russel about the missionary who came to the village and how the people stopped singing and dancing because the missionary had made them afraid of going to hell. Russel knows that this is wrong but cannot, in the beginning, understand why. In another instance, the girl Nancy explains to Russel that she left her home village because a missionary told her that to have a baby without being married is a sin. Rather than challenge the missionary, the young girl leaves her home and everything she knows because she takes on the shame of a culture that is not her own. These two instances give an indication that this brand of Christianity is harmful to Eskimos or other indigenous people because it goes against their traditional ways.

Russel acts against Western religion on two different levels. First of all, he turns his back on the belief that singing and dancing are evil when he promises Oogruk that he will become his own song. Secondly, Russel takes Nancy with him on his journey north. It is interesting that Russel never speaks out against his father's religion. The character shows his maturity by simply choosing the path that works best for him.

Reunification of the Self

The most salient theme of this novel is the reunification of the self. Reunifying the self becomes important for Russel Susskit when he begins to recognize that he is angry and uncomfortable most of the time. The lesson of the Old Way presses against Russel's subconscious in a way that makes it difficult for him to ignore what is going on inside of him. The first part of the novel deals with Russel's feelings of disconnection and confusion. As he finds his way, however, Russel comes to understand that the matter is not simply a choice between the New Way and the Old Way, but a choice between his true self and the self which is determined for him.

Russel is already fragmented when the novel begins. First of all, he is raised by a single father after his mother abandons them for a white trapper. Russel never mentions his mother. Secondly, Russel's father is a Christian, which further separates him from his biological family. As such, Russel does not root to anything or anyone. Finally, Russel is a stranger to himself in that he cannot articulate the feelings he is having. Russel truly wants to explain to his father what is going on inside of him, but he does not have the tools of self-expression.

The first step Russel Susskit takes toward self-actualization is his visit to Oogruk. Listening to Oogruk, things begin to fall into place for Russel. He learns that Oogruk is one of the founding fathers of the village. Oogruk's stories give Russel a sense of place and history that he did not learn from his father. In Eskimo culture, it is not unusual for



people who are not blood relatives to live together. When Russel moves in with Oogruk, he becomes part of a true family.

Next, Oogruk reminds Russel that (traditionally) women make life easier for men by cooking for them and caring for the home. Russel has no experience of the effect a woman can have on a man's life. He learns of the importance of male-female relationships in Eskimo culture by way of his dream. When he encounters Nancy, Russel has the opportunity to experience providing for a woman. Like his dream-self, Russel is responsible for shelter and food. Unlike his dream-self, however, Russel manages to help Nancy survive.

Perhaps the most important part of Russel Susskit's self-reunification is his relationship with the dog team. By bonding with the animals, Russel comes to know himself as a capable leader and a man who is able to survive in even the harshest of conditions. Following the Old Way provides Russel with self-confidence and a sense of purpose that he would not have learned had he remained in the small village. By braving the elements and learning to trust the dogs' wisdom, Russel learns that he is just as much a part of nature as they are. Knowing that he can provide food, shelter, and safety for himself and those who depend on him, Russel is able to complete himself and his own song. By the end of the novel, Russel Susskit understands that he belongs to no one but himself.

Style

Point of View

Even though no specific location is ever mentioned, the entire novel takes place somewhere in the "semi-arctic" north. The novel takes place during the winter, when Russel, his father and other Eskimos live in a small government village. From the novel, it is clear that winters in the frozen north can be harsh and forbidding. Outside the walls of Russel's tiny government village, there are blizzards and fog, floating ice and howling winds. And although Russel's exact location is unknown, there are other features which might help a reader identify the character's whereabouts. The narrative talks about tundra and the wildlife found there. There are ptarmigan, foxes, bears, seals, walruses and caribou in the wilderness of the north. Also, in the distant past, the woolly mammoth roamed the land where Russel Susskit's Eskimo ancestors hunted. Also, the Aurora Borealis is mentioned. One can safely assume that Russel lives either in northern Canada or in Alaska.

There is a direct contrast between Russel's life in the wilderness and his life in the government village. In the winter village, there is a school and everyone travels by snowmobile (referred to in the novel as "snowmachines"). Russel's father uses diesel oil to start the fire that heats their small home. There is a school in the village and a game room with a television, where the people pass the hours during the long, dark winters. Unlike the amazing natural world around him, the government village is not beautiful or interesting to Russel.

Setting

With the exception of the quotes which precede the first five chapters, the novel is told from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator. Each one of the quotes used gives the reader an idea of what life was like for the Eskimos before Russel's time. The quotes are like snapshots and they paint a picture of how things must have looked and felt before the time of modern conveniences and outside influences. In addition, these quotes are important because they provide signposts for Russel's journey. For example, the first quote addresses a man's memory of being born. Similarly, the first chapter tells Russel's family history. The quote which precedes chapter five talks about the importance of the shaman (medicine man/healer) in the Eskimo culture. The chapter itself deals with Oogruk's place in Russel's life as a guide and an important elder. His history, Eskimo history, is already written on Russel's life before he takes the dog team out for the first time. The feeling is that the stories of his ancestors are just waiting for Russel to awaken. Using an omniscient (neutral) narrator allows the reader to come to his/her own conclusions about what is being said. The narrator simply sets the scene and tells the reader what occurs without giving an opinion. In this way, the story being told belongs to the person reading it.



The final section, titled "Dogsong", is told from Russel's perspective. The omniscient narrator is the storyteller, and the language used reflects the oral tradition of storytelling of the Eskimos and other indigenous people. This song is written in Russel's words. The Dogsong represents Russel's coming into his own as a young man and as an Eskimo who is able to embrace and celebrate his own culture. Oogruk's dog team are part of Russel and part of his experience of life.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in English and there are Eskimo words interspersed throughout. The word "mukluks" (fur boots) is used often, as is the word "muktuk" which means whale blubber and skin. Other words which may seem unusual to the reader are "innerparka" and "outerparka" as well as the word "breechclout", a garment that covers the loins. The novel itself is told in such a way as to resemble a story being told in the oral tradition.

When the novel begins, Russel Susskit's story is told in plain, everyday language. As the novel progresses and Russel's journey becomes more and more real, the language becomes highly descriptive, almost dreamy. For example, at one point the narrator declares that "[Russel] waited for some kind of sadness to come but it did not, did not [...]" (p. 71). Another passage reads, "Into the white line of the ice-blink where the mother of wind lives to send down the white death of the northern storms" (p. 80). The further Russel travels from his village and the modern ways, the more the story takes on an ethereal tone. This noticeable shift in language, which begins around chapter six, signifies the intensity of Russel's emotional and physical experience as he travels with the dogs. The language becomes part of the wild landscape, where things are familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. In Dogsong, the language of the Old Way and the way of the shaman become one with the language of Russel's inner point of view.

Structure

The novel is 177 pages long and it is divided into three parts. Part One ("The Trance") is comprised of five chapters. Each of the chapters in Part One begins with a quote from an Eskimo man or woman. At the opening of chapter one, an Eskimo man remembers the day he was born. Chapter two opens with an old Eskimo man remembering his childhood. Chapter three opens with an Eskimo woman recalling her younger years. Chapter four starts with an Eskimo talking about the Russian fur hunters and their impact on the Eskimos. Chapter five begins with an old Eskimo woman talking about the role of the shaman in Eskimo society. Each of the quotes included give a glimpse into the life and experiences of Russel's people. These brief remembrances also give the reader some insight into what Russel might be going through in his own life.

Part Two contains chapters six through fourteen and the third part of the novel is Russel's song. Part Three, the shortest section of the novel, is only three pages long and contains no narrative. That is to say, Part Three is simply a poem which is the result



of Russel's learning to live according to the old way and his journey north. Part Two is titled "The Dreamrun". The chapters in this section deal with Russel running the dogs north or Russel's continuing dream. Chapters six, eight, ten and twelve all bear the title "The Run". Conversely, Chapters seven, nine, eleven and thirteen are all titled "The Dream". Chapter fourteen is called "The Dreamrun". This title ("The Dreamrun") signifies the blending of Russel's real-life experience with the experience of his dream.



Quotes

"Oogruk didn't use [the dogs] but simply kept them for memories" (Chapter 1, page 7).

"At first it was hard to know where the smoke ended and Oogruk began"
Chap. 1, p. 14

"The girls smiled at [Russel] with round faces and merry eyes but he was not ready for women yet and so knew nothing of them"
Chap. 2, p. 18

"Eyes and meat taste better when cooked by women. That's the truth"
Chap. 2, p. 18

"Fat was everything. And while deer fat wasn't as good as whale or seal or even pig lard from the trading post, it was good enough when it was hot."
Chap. 2, p. 23

"[Russel] thought of cold not as an enemy but as many different kinds of friend or a complicated ally."
Chap. 3, p. 48

"[Russel] might not make it, he might die on the ice, but he would not die with fear. He would die working not to die."
Chap. 4, p. 62

"Out. Into the sweeps, into the great places where the land runs to the sky and into the sky until there is no land and there is no sky. Out"
Chap. 6, p. 79

"Soul color is the daylight."
Chap. 6, p. 80

"It was the kind of smile all men look for in women, the kind that reaches inside, and Russel felt warm to see it."
Chap. 7, p. 92

"Russel knew it all because he knew them all. He was the man and he was the dream. He was the fog."
Chap. 7, p. 98

"Russel knew weather as all Eskimos know weather."
Chap. 8, p. 101

"Where there had been nothing he now had shelter and food and heat and comfort. where there had been nothing he had become something."
Chap. 8, p. 108



"[The man] was in a new land but the people were known to him as all people are known to all other people [...]"

Chap. 9, p. 110

"To have been close to death and come back could not be done without the pain of birth."

Chap. 2, p. 137

"Where there had been a place of life, a place of laughter and round fat faces, where there had been a place of things that meant home and living, there was only the bleak shreds of flapping leather and the signs of death."

Chap. 13, p. 141

"With food, anything was possible."

Chap. 14, p. 164

"They carry me / into all things, all things I will be; / all things that will come to me / will come to my dogs. I stand on the earth and I sing."

Dogsong, p. 175



Topics for Discussion

What does Outside mean to Russel Susskit?

Why does Oogruk not run his dogs anymore?

Explain why Jesus Christ is so important to Russel's father.

Why does Russel give the caribou eyes to Oogruk?

Why does Oogruk refuse to give Russel a song of his own?

What is the first animal that Russel Susskit kills? Why is this important to know?

What does Oogruk mean when he tells Russel that "sometimes words lie — but the song is always true" on page eleven?

What happens the first time Russel takes the dogs out for a run?

How does Russel change the course of his dream?

Why does Russel Susskit go north? What does he find there?