

# **Old Yeller Study Guide**

## **Old Yeller by Fred Gipson**

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## Overview

In *Old Yeller*, Gipson skillfully works believable characters into an exciting plot in which wild bulls crash into a family's cabin, a bear nearly kills a young boy, and a wolf attacks a dog.

Even though modern young readers do not tend to have such dramatic adventures, they can easily empathize with Travis Coates, the novel's fourteen-year-old protagonist, as he reacts to these experiences. Like Travis, they may find that their mother relies on them to keep the family together. They too may have a younger sibling who is both endearing and exasperating. They, too, may have to fight fear and sorrow to act courageously.

*Old Yeller* is also a wonderful book for those who love to read about animals.

*Old Yeller*, the stray dog Travis and Arliss take in, is an ugly, food-stealing mongrel. He is also intelligent, loyal, and brave. Anyone who has known the special love a pet can offer will not soon forget *Old Yeller's* antics and the terrible ordeal that awaits him and Travis at the conclusion.

## About the Author

Frederick Benjamin Gipson was born February 7, 1908, in Mason, Texas, where his parents were farmers. He grew up hunting and fishing and, for a time, wanted nothing more than to be a cowboy. After graduating from high school, he worked as a bookkeeper, goat herder, and bronco buster. When he was in his mid-twenties, he entered the University of Texas at Austin to major in journalism. While at the university, he developed his talent for writing, and published his first short story, "HardPressed Sam," in the Southwest Review.

Before graduating, Gipson left the university to work full-time for a newspaper. In 1940 he married Tommie Eloise Wynn; they had two sons, Mike and Beck.

For several years, Gipson worked for different newspapers and wrote stories for inexpensively produced western magazines. These magazines, which flourished in the early twentieth century, specialized in sentimental, formulaic stories about the West. His better stories appeared in the Southwest Review. One of Gipson's biggest breaks came in 1944, when Collier's, one of the most important magazines of the day, published "Lonesome Man." This was followed by his first book, *Fabulous Empire* (1946), a nonfiction account of Zack Miller and his circus rodeo. Gipson's first novel, *Hound-Dog Man* (1949), was selected by Book-of-the-Month-Club as one of its featured books. Both of these books received excellent reviews.

The 1950s were good years for Gipson's literary career. He published *Recollection Creek* (1955), *The Trail-Driving Rooster*, and his most famous novel, *Old Yeller*. Gipson based *Old Yeller* on a family story about his grandfather, who as a youth had been forced to kill his dog. Critics applauded *Old Yeller* as well-crafted and devoid of sentimentality. During this decade, Gipson won many awards for his fiction, most notably the William Allen White Children's Book Award in 1959 for *Old Yeller*.

In 1960 Gipson became president of the Texas Institute of Letters, and two years later he published his last book, *Savage Sam*, a sequel to *Old Yeller*.

Critics found it an exciting adventure story, although they believed it too violent for children. *Savage Sam* was the name of Gipson's own sons' dog; it was later beaten to death, an event which may have partly contributed to the suicide of Gipson's oldest son, Mike, shortly after the novel's publication. In 1964 Gipson and his wife divorced. Gipson married Angelina Torres in 1967; their marriage lasted less than a year. Ill health, alcoholism, and personal disappointments disrupted Gipson's literary career. He tried to write another sequel to *Old Yeller*, which he called *Little Arliss* (published posthumously in 1978), but he could not finish it. He died in Texas on August 14, 1973. His gravestone in Austin reads, "His Books Are His Monument."



## Plot Summary

The narrator Travis begins the novel by telling why they gave Old Yeller his name. He was yellow, or "yeller," in color and he had a loud bark. Travis says how Old Yeller made him so mad when he first came that he wanted to kill him but when he had to kill him later on it is really hard, since he had come to think very highly of the dog. Old Yeller arrives in the late 1860s, the same time Papa leaves to Abilene on the cattle drive for money. Travis is left behind with his brother, Little Arliss, and Mama to take care of the place and protect and provide for the family. Travis finishes the chores for that day, including plowing between the cornrows with their mule Jumper, and feels confident he can handle things while Papa is gone.

A "yeller" dog shows up the morning after Papa leaves and steals meat Travis has hanging up. When Little Arliss sees the dog he claims it as his and Mama lets Little Arliss keep him. Travis is mad and Mama argues that Little Arliss needs a dog to play with and says Travis had one when he was little. She tells Travis to think about it and sends him out to shoot a doe.

Travis is still angry but he enjoys hunting. He heads to the Salt Licks where all the animals go to lick the salt out from the rocks. He sees some of the range cattle and watches two squirrels play. After laughing out loud at the squirrels' antics he realizes he has scared a doe that is only a few feet away. Travis has to shoot her on the run and worries he will not make a killing shot. He does, however, making him even more confident in his ability to take care of things like a man.

Travis catches Little Arliss and Old Yeller playing in the drinking water. When Travis throws rocks at Old Yeller, Little Arliss comes back and throws rocks at him. Mama breaks up the fight and both boys get disciplined. Travis tries to bait Old Yeller into stealing more meat by hanging up the doe meat, but Old Yeller does not touch it.

Two range bulls, Roany and Chongo, come and fight in the yard. Old Yeller tries to scare them away at first but Travis throws rocks at him again because Travis wants to see the fight. Travis does not see the danger the family is in until the bulls crash into the fence they are sitting on. Mama pulls Travis out from under the fighting bulls and they all run to the cabin. Travis tries to get Old Yeller to chase the bulls now but Old Yeller just runs away. Travis takes a whip out to try and chase the bulls away but they are not paying attention. Finally Chongo flips Roany into a two-wheeled cart and the cart rolls down the hill into the creek. Roany is dumped out into the water and he runs off into the woods. Chongo runs away as well after he gets his tongue scraped on the spinning cart's wheel.

Travis is splitting rails to fix the yard fence when he hears Little Arliss scream. Something in Little Arliss's voice sends him running as fast as he can to the creek where Little Arliss is holding on to the hind leg of a bear cub. The cub's mother is charging Little Arliss from across the creek. Travis sees that neither he nor Mama, who also heard Little Arliss scream, is going to get to Little Arliss in time to pull him to safety.



Suddenly Old Yeller comes out and attacks the mother bear. This gives Travis enough time to grab Little Arliss, and throw him to Mama. All three of them run to the house and Old Yeller almost beats Travis there. Once he sees the whole family is safe, he runs back to the house as well. Mama and Little Arliss are crying and they all pet Old Yeller all over.

Travis is so thankful to Old Yeller for saving Little Arliss that he starts treating him better. Travis realizes he loves his little brother so he takes Little Arliss and Old Yeller squirrel hunting the next day to show them how much he cares. He puts up with Little Arliss's pesky ways and they have a good time. Travis and Mama notice Old Yeller is not eating very much.

A neighbor, Bud Searcy, visits with his granddaughter, Lisbeth. He did not go on the cattle drive with the other men and Mama thinks he is shiftless. Searcy tells them about a possible case of hydrophobia and how his uncle got the disease. The uncle tied himself to a tree and slobbered and tried to bite his wife and kids until he died and they buried him under the same tree. Searcy also tells the family that something or someone is stealing from the settlement. Lisbeth pulls Travis aside and tells him it is Old Yeller. She says she will not tell anyone since Old Yeller is the father to her dog's puppies. Searcy and Lisbeth leave and Travis is worried someone might shoot Old Yeller if they catch him.

Travis tells Mama about Old Yeller stealing and they lock him in the bedroom with Travis and Little Arliss at night. Travis and Old Yeller chase the raccoons and skunks out of the corn patch. Travis daydreams about the horse Papa promised to bring back with him. Old Yeller helps Travis bring home the Spot heifer and make her stand to be milked.

A man named Burn Sanderson comes and claims Old Yeller. Travis is upset, but Mama says they have to give Old Yeller up. Sanderson offers to let them keep Old Yeller until Papa returns but Mama does not want them getting more attached. When Sanderson goes to leave with Old Yeller, Little Arliss gets mad and throws rocks at Sanderson and his horse. Sanderson laughs it off and offers a trade to Little Arliss. If Mama will cook him a meal, then he will let Little Arliss have Old Yeller. Little Arliss agrees. Before Sanderson leaves he warns Travis about the hydrophobic plague and tells him to shoot any animal that acts unnatural.

Travis forgets about the plague and he and Old Yeller head out to mark hogs. They must catch the pigs the sows had over the year and mark their ears with their specific mark claiming ownership, and then castrate the male ones. It is dangerous work but Travis feels confident with Old Yeller. They work out a system where Old Yeller brings the hogs to a tree where Travis ropes them from a limb and pulls the little pig up so he can mark him. Travis and Old Yeller mark all their pigs and believe to be done with the job when Bud Searcy tells them there is another bunch in bat country they have forgotten.

Travis and Old Yeller locate the missing hogs but cannot get them to a tree because they hole up under a dirt bank. Travis thinks he can rope them by lying on the bank, but



the bank gives way and he lands in the middle of the angry hogs. He gets cut on his leg before he can run away and Old Yeller jumps into save him. Travis runs but then returns for Old Yeller who is cut up and hiding under a rock. Old Yeller has his belly slit open and is in pain. Travis wraps Old Yeller in his shirt and then places him under a rock with a mesquite stump in front of it. Travis limps home and after Mama doctors his trembling, bleeding leg he wants to return for Old Yeller. Mama says he cannot go at first but then she, Travis, Little Arliss, and Jumper return to bring Old Yeller home.

Travis and Mama think Old Yeller is dead at first because they see buzzards flying around, but then they hear him barking. Mama sends Little Arliss off to catch a green lizard while she sews up Old Yeller's belly with a strand of hair from Jumper's tail. Mama arranges Little Arliss and Old Yeller on a cow hide with pillows that they strap to Jumper. Travis rides Jumper and Mama leads him home. Travis is so thankful to return with Old Yeller, he does not mind the pain of his leg,

Old Yeller and Travis spend several weeks in bed recuperating. Mama has to do all the chores herself now. Bud Searcy comes to visit with Lisbeth. Lisbeth brings Travis a speckled pup from Miss Prissy's litter but he tells her to give it to Little Arliss and this hurts her feelings. Travis feels he already has a dog in Old Yeller. Little Arliss takes the pup and Searcy leaves Lisbeth to help Mama.

Travis and Mama do not believe Lisbeth will be much help, but she proves them wrong. She helps with all the chores without being told. Lisbeth, Mama, and Little Arliss gather the corn and Travis wishes he could go out there and help since it looks like they are having so much fun. Then the Spot heifer comes home stumbling and bawling one morning after missing her evening milking. Mama goes to let her in the pen with her calf and she tries to fight Mama. Mama and Travis are worried she might have hydrophobia but they decide to wait and see.

The roan bull then comes to the house acting worse. When Old Yeller rises from his place by Travis and growls, Travis knows that the bull is sick with hydrophobia. The bull stumbles towards the spring where Lisbeth and Little Arliss are, and then turns on Mama. He falls to the ground before he reaches her and Travis gets his gun and shoots the roan bull in the head.

Mama and Lisbeth burn the body of the roan bull so that the disease cannot be spread to the drinking water. They must head into the woods to get logs to burn and they pull them on Jumper. Travis follows the Spot heifer out from the house and when she is on bare ground where her burning carcass will not start a fire, he shoots her as well. Mama and Travis worry that all their cattle may become infected with hydrophobia. Mama and Lisbeth head out to burn the Spot heifer as well. Old Yeller goes with them at the last minute.

Travis is watching Little Arliss but worries when darkness falls and they are not home yet. He gets supper for Little Arliss and the speckled pup. Then he hears dogs fighting and Mama calling for him to get his gun and make a light. Travis makes a light with some bear grass and sits with his gun ready, when he sees Old Yeller fighting with





something as big as he is. Mama calls that it is a mad loafer wolf. Travis does not want to shoot Old Yeller but then the wolf has him in a throat hold and Travis shoots the wolf.

Mama tells Travis how it took them a long time to burn the heifer. When they were returning they stopped at Birdsong Creek to get a drink and the wolf attacked them. Mama whacked the wolf on the head with a stick and then Old Yeller started fighting him. The two fought all the way home, Old Yeller keeping the wolf from getting them while they raced home on Jumper. Suddenly, Mama realizes that Old Yeller has been bitten by the wolf and could have hydrophobia. Travis insists they wait and see but Mama says they cannot take the risk. Travis knows this and he shoots Old Yeller in the head.

Travis is devastated by Old Yeller's death. He feels empty and hurt. The rain comes and washes away the hydrophobia plague and Papa returns home. He brings Travis a horse but Travis is not very excited about it. Mama tells Papa about Old Yeller. Papa goes and talks to Travis and tells him how proud his is of how he handled things. He calls him a man and tells him he has to focus on the good in life. Travis understands but it is not until the speckled pup steals cornbread and then plays in spring with Little Arliss that Travis starts to feel better. He then decides to see the good in life and makes up his mind to take the speckled pup and Little Arliss squirrel hunting the next day. Travis concludes by thinking if the speckled pup is old enough to act like Old Yeller, he might as well learn a few things and start earning his keep.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The narrator is introduced to the reader in the first person, and he in turn introduces Old Yeller right away. The narrator tells of how they named Old Yeller and how he remembers how he strayed to their log cabin on Birdsong Creek. The next sentence summarizes the plot when the narrator says, "He made me so mad at first that I wanted to kill him. Then later, when I had to kill him, it was like having to shoot some of my own folks." The setting is Birdsong Creek in the hill country of Texas during the time after the Civil War. In the late 1860s, the narrator's father and other settlers from the area known as Salt Licks, pooled together their steers and drove them horseback to Abilene, Kansas for cash money. The narrator's father believes that the new country is a good one and with everything else at hand such as wild game, water and corn, all they need is money to round out their claims. The bad part is leaving behind the women and children to fend for themselves in a wild frontier for several months. But they all feel it is best and so the narrator's father saddles his horse and begins to say goodbye to his family.

Papa loves on Mama and the narrator's younger brother, Little Arliss, who is five-years-old, cries loudly. The narrator says he is fourteen and isn't about to cry. Papa takes the narrator aside and addresses him as Travis. He wants Travis to fill his shoes while he is gone and look after things. The request is not taken lightly as Travis will have to keep food on hand for his family by hunting and keeping track of livestock as well as taking care of the corn for winter. Before his father leaves, Travis asks him to bring back a horse, but Papa says what he really needs is a good dog. Papa agrees to bring back a horse if Travis does his work. Travis feels important and proud after he shakes his father's hand and feels he can handle anything that comes along. Travis goes on to tell of the importance of a good dog and how he had one when he was little. A good dog can keep you safe from the dangers of the frontier by being a protector, a hunter and a help with the livestock. Travis's dog's name was Bell and he gets killed when a rattlesnake bites him. Travis is devastated. Papa tries to get Travis another dog, but Travis won't hear of it. Travis claims all he wants now is a horse.

Travis tells of how his mother named Birdsong Creek because the first time they camped there she and Papa heard mockingbirds singing in the blooming bee myrtle. Instead of moving on with the other settlers, Papa and Mama make their home there. Now it is Travis's turn to look after it since it is his home as well. Upon returning to the home site after saying goodbye to Papa, Travis finds Little Arliss naked and playing in the drinking water. Travis hollers at him, threatens to spank him and then cuts a switch to do just that. Little Arliss heads for the house screaming and gets Mama's attention.

Mama thinks Travis has already spanked him but when she hears why Little Arliss is in trouble she sides with Travis. She tells Little Arliss to listen to his big brother and makes him sit in the dog run, the place between the two rooms of their log cabin that also has a



roof over it. Travis goes on to do chores, but Little Arliss gets in Travis's way when Travis is chopping wood and returns to the dog run until dinner. After dinner, Travis hooks up the mule named Jumper and finishes running out the corn middles without Mama having to tell him to. Travis shows Jumper he is not to be messed with when Jumper tries to head for the house, and thumps him on the head with a cedar club. They finish the rows and when Travis returns to the house he sees Mama has kept his supper for him, just like she would have done for Papa. This encourages Travis and he feels like he is man enough to handle things with Papa gone, especially since Mama thinks so as well.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

Travis sums up his feelings for Old Yeller as well as the plot of the book in the first two paragraphs of the novel. Readers are drawn in to wonder why he hated Old Yeller at first, how he came to love him, and finally, why he had to kill him. The author tells readers of the times and gives a detailed description of the setting. By doing this the three major themes of the book are introduced, first the theme of coming of age, second the theme of survival, and finally the theme of family. The times are dangerous and made for hard living. Not only does Travis have to deal with his own survival, but he also must ensure the survival of his mother and brother, like his father would do if he were there. Putting family first will become the ultimate test of survival. This ties into the coming of age theme since to survive a means becoming a man. The author displays how Travis is still a boy by revealing that he wants to cry when Papa leaves, and that he revels in his own confidence at being in charge.

Foreshadowing also links these themes. Travis tells how great of a dog Bell was and that he died a death due to the dangers of the frontier. He ends by saying he cannot imagine another dog taking Bell's place and how it made him mad to just think about it. This comment will mirror the feelings Travis has after Old Yeller dies. When Papa leaves he tells Travis of his responsibilities, which are cows to milk, wood to cut, pigs to mark and fresh meat to shoot. He stresses the importance of keeping the corn free of varmints so that they will have it for the winter. By telling Travis his responsibilities the reader is let on to some of the obstacles Travis will have to face in the future.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

The morning after Papa leaves, the yeller dog shows up. When Travis goes out to the dog run to cut down some meat that is hanging there, Travis finds the meat gone and the yeller dog curled up on the ground. Travis describes the dog as being big and ugly with one ear chewed off and a stub tail. His belly is obviously full from the meat he ate and the dog comes towards Travis to be petted. Travis kicks at the dog and yells at him. The dog ducks and then falls on the ground as if in pain. This brings Mama and Little Arliss out from the house. Travis explains what happened to Mama but when Little Arliss sees the dog he is so excited he falls on him and pets him all over. Little Arliss turns on Travis telling him not to kick the dog and grabs a stick to hit Travis with. Travis is so surprised he gets hit once before Mama takes the stick away. Little Arliss claims the dog as his and Mama agrees with him. Since it appears the dog is a stray then there is no reason why Little Arliss can't have him. When Travis tries to argue with her, Mama tells Travis to be fair. Travis had a dog when he was younger and Little Arliss should have one now since he gets lonely and is too little for Travis to play with. Travis is angry but does not say anymore. He decides he will find some way to get rid of the dog. He sulks because he wanted meat to go with the cornmeal mush Mama makes for breakfast. After breakfast, Mama asks Travis to go out and shoot a doe for meat and think about what she said about Little Arliss keeping the stray dog.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

The story of Old Yeller coming to the house is humorous for the reader even though Travis, who is angry, is telling it. Little Arliss turning on Travis with a stick and Travis being surprised by the attack is a funny picture of sibling rivalry. Mama reasons that Travis had Bell so it is only fair that Little Arliss should have this stray dog. Throughout the novel, the reader will see that Travis reacts with anger to a lot of situations, and being proved wrong or contradicted makes him the angriest. The fact that Little Arliss has claimed this dog and wants to keep him, even though he is a thief, infuriates Travis enough that he is determined not to like Old Yeller at all. Mama reacts more practically to the thieving dog and sees a playmate for Little Arliss. One begins to see how Mama is levelheaded and competent as a woman in the wilderness. One also sees another level of the survival theme emerging in the importance of food. Losing that much meat means Travis has to head off into the woods and kill another animal for his family's dinner table.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Travis is still upset when he goes hunting for more meat, but he milks the cows and catches Jumper so that the mule can carry back the deer. Once Travis and Jumper are on their way, Travis thinks how nice it would be to be riding his own horse instead of an old mule. He leaves Jumper tied up away from the Salt Licks, where he is headed to hunt so that Jumper will not scare off any game or take off when Travis fires his gun. Travis comments on the beauty of the day but realizes he must be downwind from game so that they do not smell him and get spooked. This is something Papa taught him and Travis makes his way around the Salt Licks until he is downwind and he leans against a tree with his rifle across his knees and keep real still. It isn't the shape a deer sees but the movement.

Travis describes the Salt Licks as an "outcropping of dark rocks with streaks in them." The black streaks hold the salt and all the animals, including range livestock and wild animals, come there to lick it. Travis recalls a story Papa told him about how he and Mama ran out of salt so they beat pieces of the rock and boiled them in water. They used the salty water to season their food. Since wild game comes to lick the rocks in the early morning and late evenings that is the best time to hunt. The predator animals also know this so they come there at that time as well. Travis hopes to get a shot at a bear or a panther. He is disappointed when a small band of javelina hogs are the only ones that show up. He doesn't want to shoot them since wounding one means the whole herd might come after him and eat him alive. Travis recalls a story of how Jed Simpson's boy Rosal shot at a group of javalinas then they took after him. The hogs ended up treeing Rosal in a mesquite tree and would not leave until dark.

Some range cows come into the opening with their calves as well as a roan bull. The cattle lick the rocks and Travis watches them; then he sees two squirrels as they play in a nearby tree. The squirrels are making a game of jumping from limb to limb and Travis finds the site so funny he laughs out loud. This is where he makes his mistake.

A doe has come out and gotten very close to Travis without him seeing her. After he laughs, the doe takes notice of him and is staring right at him snorting and stomping her feet trying to figure out what he is. Travis does not want to raise his gun to shoot her since he might make her run. He is worried he cannot shoot a running deer, unlike Papa, who can. The deer continues to stare at him and then comes towards him making Travis nervous. He pulls his gun to his shoulder and the doe takes off. Travis fires at her, reloads and goes running through the smoke from his gun. To Travis's dismay he sees he has shot the deer, but did not make a killing shot. Papa had told Travis that every animal has to kill to live, but to wound an animal is something else. Travis is sick to think of the deer dying a slow death, hurting for days. He brings his gun up again, hoping to make a final shot but the cattle are too close to the deer and he does not want to shoot one of them. Then the deer runs itself into a tree and falls to the ground and



lies still. Travis runs to her and sees he shot her straight through the heart and therefore made a killing shot after all. He had shot her on the run, just like Papa would do.

Heading home with the deer strapped to Jumper, Travis feels like maybe he is too big and important to make a fuss about Little Arliss and the yeller dog. His mind changes, however, when he sees Little Arliss and the yeller dog in the drinking water when he gets home. Travis surprises them both by yelling at Little Arliss to get out of there. Little Arliss starts screaming and the dog starts barking at Travis. Travis jumps off the mule and starts throwing rocks at the dog and hits him right between the eyes. The dog yelps and falls down and then when he gets up Travis whacks him with another rock. The dog heads for the house but Little Arliss comes at Travis throwing rocks and catches him in the ear with one.

Travis reasons that he cannot have a rock fight with his little brother so he heads for the house like the yeller dog, calling for Mama. Mama catches Little Arliss, spanks him for playing in the drinking water and then yells at Travis for being so bossy. Travis cuts the meat up and feels sorry for himself. He hangs the meat in the dog run for two reasons, one because it is handy and cool there, and two because he wants to bait Old Yeller. If he steals meat again Mama will have to get rid of him. Old Yeller just chews on some bones left over and never touches the meat.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter the reader sees a little more of the boy that is still in Travis as he watches the squirrels play and when he runs to the house after Little Arliss starts pelting him with rocks. The reader must remember that though Travis is older than Little Arliss, he still is very young to be taking on the jobs of a grown man, especially in these frontier times. Mama having to discipline both boys shows she has the final say as to what happens. Travis is very competent at providing for the family, however. Telling of hunting the deer is exciting and one is happy to see Travis triumph. Papa has told Travis survival means every creature must kill to live. Travis has learned a lot from Papa and he uses what he has learned to overcome the obstacles he faces in the novel by recalling what he believes Papa would do.

Most of the situations presented to Travis are ones Papa has been in before, but the prospects of something happening that Travis has to deal with on his own may be daunting. If Travis doesn't shoot the doe, then they won't have the meat to eat. A real man will kill an animal on the run, and that is exactly what Travis ends up doing causing him to have more faith in himself as the man of the house. The story of the javelina hogs is an introduction to the danger these animals can produce. At the end of this chapter Travis also begins to call Old Yeller by name, instead of just "that dog."



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Travis claims that a few days later he has another reason to get rid of Old Yeller. Two range bulls are belling at each other from a ways off, trying to start a fight. Each bull is coming from an opposite side of the house. Travis listens to them and decides he wants to see the bulls fight. The first bull enters the field by their house where Papa cleared out the brush and trees. Travis describes the bull as mustard-colored with black spots and he is named Chongo because that is what the Mexicans called a droop horn. The bull has one normal horn and one that hangs down past his jaw. The other bull is heard coming closer and Travis, Mama, and Little Arliss climb on the split-rail fence where they can watch the fight.

Once the other bull reaches the clearing Travis sees it is the same roan bull he saw at the Salt Licks the day he shot the doe. As the bulls face each other throwing up dust and belling, Old Yeller comes running out and starts barking at the bulls. Travis yells at him and picks up a rock to hit Old Yeller. Old Yeller runs for the house but Travis has made Little Arliss mad. Mama talks Little Arliss into putting down the rock he is going to throw at Travis, and they climb back on the fence. Travis thinks Chongo is going to win and Mama bets on Roany. Travis thinks to himself that they are ready to have a good time and does not believe they are in any danger.

Chongo charges first and knocks Roany down when he hits him. Roany gets to his feet to hit Chongo broadside and the two bulls start coming towards the rail fence where Travis, Mama and Little Arliss are sitting. Mama jumps from the fence and pulls Little Arliss down with her. Travis does not jump from the fence in time due to his excitement and when the bulls hit the fence Travis falls to the ground practically right under the fighting bulls. Mama manages to grab Travis's hand and pull him out from under the fighting bulls. The whole family runs into the cabin. Roany and Chongo crash into the frame of the door of the cabin, but do not go through it. The two bulls continue to fight down the length of the cabin. Travis does not want the bulls to wreck the house so he gets mad and grabs a whip from the wall.

Mama doesn't want Travis to go outside so she tells him to send Old Yeller after the bulls and chase them away. The bulls knock down more of the fence. Old Yeller sees Travis coming at him with the whip yelling at him to get the bulls and he turns and runs into the woods. Travis is so mad he wants to kill Old Yeller.

Travis tries to break up the bulls fighting by whipping them but they keep smashing into each other. Suddenly, Chongo runs Roany up against a two-wheeled cart and hooks his single horn under Roany's belly. Chongo flips Roany into the cart on his back. The cart takes off down the hill with the bull in it. Chongo stares at the runaway cart trying to figure out where the roan bull went. Meanwhile the cart hits a boulder and dumps Roany into the spring. The ride and getting wet are too much for him and he runs away into the





woods. Chongo sees Roany running and goes after him but stops when he sees the upturned cart. One wheel is still spinning and Chongo foolishly sticks his tongue out to taste it. Rocks from the trip down the hill are attached to the wheel and they scrape Chongo's tongue. He runs in pain in the opposite direction the roan bull went.

Travis thinks it is funny how both bulls got scared and ran away thinking they had lost, but comments on the damage they did to the yard fence.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Travis is mad at Old Yeller but the reader can see that Travis is really at fault. Travis should have let Old Yeller chase away the bulls when they first started fighting instead of assuming he, Mama, and Little Arliss were not in any danger. Old Yeller can sense danger but Travis does not give Old Yeller much of a chance to prove his worth. When he does need him, Old Yeller assumes Travis is still angry with him and runs away. At this point, Travis and Old Yeller have not reached the level of understanding that they will form later on. The story of the bull ends on a humorous note, but reintroducing the cattle into the novel makes one think they may have another purpose later on.





# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Travis tells of how Little Arliss always catches and keeps "every living thing that ran, flew, jumped or crawled." Because of this, Mama always makes him empty his pockets at night. In his pockets he has had everything from grasshoppers and toads to bugs and even a copperhead snake that scare Mama. After that Mama made Travis teach Little Arliss how to kill snakes. After Old Yeller came, however, Little Arliss started bringing home even bigger game such as rabbits and birds. Old Yeller would catch the game and then give it to Little Arliss and he would tell Mama he caught it himself. Travis tells of the time Little Arliss grabs a fish that Old Yeller caught. The fish stabs Little Arliss with a fin but even though he is in pain Little Arliss won't let go of the fish. After Mama medicates and bandages the wound with a poultice then Little Arliss tells a tall tale about how he got the fish from under a big rock and almost drowned bringing him to shore. Mama lets Little Arliss tell the story but Travis thinks it is wrong of Little Arliss to tell such big lies. Travis believes his tall tales are what make Little Arliss do what he does next, which is catch a bear.

Travis is splitting rails to fix the fence the bulls knocked down. He is heading towards the house when he hears Little Arliss scream. Even though Little Arliss is normally a screamer no matter what, this time Travis knows that it is different and his heart catches. Travis runs up the trail as fast as he can. Travis hears Little Arliss scream again, and also hears a whimpering sound that is not Little Arliss. Then he hears the worst sound, the sound of a charging bear, which he recognizes right away. When Travis finally reaches the opening where he can see he is chilled to the bone. Little Arliss is at the spring and is holding onto the back leg of a little black bear cub. The cub is whimpering and trying to pull away but Little Arliss is too scared to let go and the cub is too scared to bite him. The cub's mama, however, is hearing her baby cry and is coming in fast for Little Arliss.

Travis sees that he will never get to Little Arliss before the mama bear does. Neither can Mama, who is running from the house obviously hearing Little Arliss scream as well.

Both Mama and Travis are yelling at Little Arliss to let the bear loose. The mama bear reaches the spring and is running across it at Little Arliss. Suddenly Old Yeller comes out of the brush and slams into the side of the angry bear. Old Yeller gets a hold of her throat as she stands up on her hind feet. Meanwhile, Travis is able to get Little Arliss away from the cub and he hands Little Arliss to Mama who runs towards the house with him in her arms. Travis turns on the bear with his ax but sees that Old Yeller is doing a good job of keeping her distracted. Old Yeller isn't even a third of the size of the bear, but he is letting her charge at him and even slap at him, only to get right back into position again.



Mama yells at Travis to get back to the house, and he runs back barely beating Old Yeller to the door. Once Old Yeller sees that the family is safe, he too runs to the house. Mama says the bear followed him for a little while but Old Yeller was running too fast for the bear. Little Arliss is still scared and holding onto Mama. Mama is holding onto Little Arliss and crying. Travis feels like crying, and Old Yeller comes into the house jumping and licking everyone. Travis comments that Old Yeller seems to think the bear fight was a nothing but a fun time.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Travis is a seeker of truth, and prefers to see things as they are. Therefore, he is not impressed with Little Arliss's fibs about catching game. Travis's frustration with Little Arliss is compared to his love for him when he runs as fast as he can to try and save Little Arliss from the bear. It seems only right that of the entire family it is Little Arliss that Old Yeller saves first, since Little Arliss has so much faith in him and loves him. The themes of survival and family are tightly interwoven as Travis tries to get to his little brother to save him from certain death. The emotional reunion of all of them in the cabin, including Old Yeller, reinforces the unity this frontier family has. The survival of the family is the most important thing.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Travis realizes after Old Yeller rescues Little Arliss from the bear that not only does he now appreciate the dog, but he also really loves his little brother. Travis feels greatly indebted to Old Yeller and claims he can't do enough for him. He pets him and takes care of him and feels bad for how he treated Old Yeller earlier. To show his care for both Old Yeller and Little Arliss he takes them squirrel hunting. Little Arliss is noisy and slow like Travis knew he would be, but he tolerates it. They work out a system where Little Arliss scares the squirrels off the ground, Old Yeller trees the squirrels, and Travis shoots them. They come home with five squirrels for supper. Old Yeller begins to help the family in all facets of their work. He helps Travis catch a turkey that is eating their peas and who Travis doesn't shoot very well because Little Arliss comes up behind him and scares both him and the turkey. Old Yeller trees the wounded turkey and Travis shoots it for dinner. Old Yeller doesn't eat any of the meat he is offered and Mama thinks Old Yeller might be stealing food from somewhere. But they don't worry about it again until Bud Searcy comes to visit.

Bud Searcy did not go on the trail drive with the other men because Mama says he would have taken too much time visiting with people and eating. According to Travis, Searcy likes to talk about the hard times with people in the settlement, spit tobacco juice all over everything and wait for someone to ask him to dinner. However, Travis likes Searcy's granddaughter Lisbeth, who is eleven. He feels she is different from most girls she doesn't boss things and likes to watch the boys play. Travis says her eyes look like they go right through him and so he has a hard time looking right at her.

Lisbeth comes with Searcy when he visits Travis's family. Lisbeth always has a dog with her that Travis thinks is one of Bell's pups. The dog comes with them and Old Yeller seems to know her because he doesn't bark as loud as normal. Mama asks Searcy and Lisbeth to get down off of their pony and come in. Searcy thinks they should sit in the coolness of the dog run and then proceeds to visit with Mama. He tells Mama how he was left behind to look after the women and children and he wants to make sure they are making out all right. Mama tells him everything is fine, and Searcy tells her all the news of the settlement.

Searcy talks about the dry weather and then tells how Jed Simpson's boy Rosal was hunting turkey and was jumped by a fox. Searcy says it looks like a case of hydrophobia to him, since the fox must have been out of his mind to attack a hunter. Searcy goes on to tell the family about an uncle he had that contracted hydrophobia when a mad dog bit him. Since the uncle knew he was going to die he tied himself to a tree with a log chain. There he lost his mind, slobbered at the mouth, and tried to get at his wife and children so he could bite them. Of course he couldn't because he had tied himself to a tree. Finally he died and they buried him there. Searcy hopes they don't all die from



hydrophobia before the men come home. He continues to talk until dinner when Mama asks him to stay.

Searcy also says how something or someone is stealing from the settlement. Meat is being stolen out of smokehouses and chickens are losing their eggs. People around Salt Licks are getting upset about it and would probably kill whoever or whatever is the thief. Travis feels uneasy and then Lisbeth motions him aside. She tells him it is Old Yeller stealing because she saw him take some ribs and eggs. Lisbeth swears not to tell because her dog, Miss Prissy, is going to have pups and Old Yeller is the father. She doesn't want the father of the puppies to get shot. Travis gives her an Indian arrowhead as a thank you and she promises again never to tell. Travis is worried and feels that if Lisbeth saw Old Yeller steal then someone else might, too. Old Yeller will be shot for sure. Travis tries to feed Old Yeller an egg from their henhouse and but Old Yeller won't eat it. Travis gets upset and tells Old Yeller that when they catch him and shoot him he will laugh, but he doesn't mean it.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

By saving Little Arliss, Old Yeller has changed Travis's feelings towards him. Since Old Yeller saved his little brother, Travis is willing to accept him into the family. Travis feels mean when he thinks of how he treated him before and he tries to make it up to Old Yeller. Travis shows both Old Yeller and Little Arliss his feelings by taking them squirrel hunting. Travis adapts to Little Arliss's loud and pesky ways while they are hunting instead of getting mad at him.

Travis does not like Bud Searcy. He feels he is useless since he talks too much and wastes time. Travis sees him as less than a man. Searcy is essential to the novel, however, because during this visit he brings two vital pieces of information to Travis and his family. First, there may be hydrophobia in the area and second someone is stealing food from the other settlers. His news is not good, and one will see that Searcy is not a source of happy news for Travis's family. His story of the uncle who contracted hydrophobia haunts Travis the rest of the novel. Lisbeth's goodness counters Searcy's uselessness and ill gossip. Travis is grateful for her warning and gives her an arrowhead hoping the gift says the words that Travis cannot. Lisbeth strengthens the family theme by commenting on how she does not want the father of the puppies to get shot. Even if they are animals, the dogs are still seen as a family in Lisbeth's eyes. Travis gets angry at Old Yeller for not eating the egg he offers him but the anger is a mask for the uneasiness he feels over the fact Old Yeller might get shot.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Travis tells Mama what Lisbeth said about Old Yeller stealing. She suggests tying him but Old Yeller just chews through it. They try to put Old Yeller in the corn crib but Old Yeller howls and barks making Little Arliss mad. Travis suggests locking him in the room where Little Arliss and Travis sleep, but Mama doesn't want Old Yeller sleeping with the boys because they will get fleas and ringworm. Travis tries to put him on a cowhide on the floor but Old Yeller just sleeps in the bed with Travis and Little Arliss. When Travis gets ringworm he does not tell Mama but treats it with turpentine. Old Yeller eats the food they offer him.

The raccoons begin to eat the corn and the skunks eat the watermelons. Other animals come in as well so Old Yeller and Travis begin sleeping in the corn patch at night to protect their food. Travis looks at the stars and talks of missing Papa. He wonders if Papa can see the same stars. Travis daydreams in the corn patch and just when he begins to drift off to sleep Old Yeller will get up and catch a coon stealing corn. After Old Yeller and the coon fight they both finally head off in separate directions. Travis and Old Yeller do not sleep much but they have a good time. The skunks are the hard part because when Old Yeller kills them by breaking their neck they still spray their scent. The smell makes Old Yeller sick and Travis cannot stand it either. Travis sees what he would have been up against if he did not have Old Yeller to help him. Old Yeller also keeps him from being lonely and allows him to have more fun. Papa had been right when he told Travis how much he needed a good dog.

Mama hopes that one of the heifer calves from their old longhorn cow Rose will give as much milk as she does. Rose finally has a heifer calf they call Spot and Mama thinks she will make a good milk cow. Spot is wild and when Travis cannot find her with the other milk cows one evening, Mama says Spot probably has had a calf and is holed up somewhere. Travis heads out to look for Spot and when he finds her she is hiding in a dense thicket with her newly born calf. Travis hollers and throws rocks at her but she will not come out. She comes after Travis with her horns and chases him away.

Travis goes back to the house and gets Old Yeller. When they return to where Spot is with her calf, Travis puts Old Yeller on the cow. The Spot heifer tries to get at Old Yeller at first but Old Yeller runs around her, bites her nose, and when he throws his weight into her the cow falls down. After falling twice the cow is ready to listen to Old Yeller. Travis and Old Yeller head home with the Spot heifer in front of them, Old Yeller heading her the whole way. When they arrive, Travis tries to milk the Spot heifer but she just kicks at him. Travis asks Old Yeller to come into the pen. He tells Old Yeller to stand there with his nose just inches from Spot's and watch her. The Spot heifer is not about to fight Old Yeller so she stops kicking and Travis milks her out. Mama is amazed and within days they have Spot broke to milk. Soon, however, a man comes to their house and claims Old Yeller as his dog.



## Chapter 7 Analysis

Travis realizes Papa was right about needing a good dog and this chapter shows the ways that Old Yeller is helping Travis. Travis shows his faith in Old Yeller by asking him to come in the pen and make the Spot heifer stand. He now believes in Old Yeller. Although Old Yeller can in no way replace Papa or Bell, Travis feels that having Old Yeller makes him not so lonely for his father. He also says they have fun together, expressing the part of him that is still a boy. The reader is led into the next chapter with the announcement of a man coming to claim Old Yeller, another example of the foreshadowing that is prevalent in the novel.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Burn Sanderson tells Mama his best dog has disappeared and after inquiring around Bud Searcy had told him that Travis's family has his dog. Mama is sad and tells Travis to call Old Yeller. Travis is upset as well and is mad at Bud Searcy for saying anything. He goes down to the creek to get Old Yeller who is playing with Little Arliss. When they return, Sanderson looks as though he feels bad about taking Old Yeller. He offers Mama, calling her Mrs. Coates, to keep Old Yeller until Papa comes home. Mama says no because the longer they keep Old Yeller the harder it will be to give him up.

When Burn Sanderson ties a rope around Old Yeller, gets on his horse and turns to leave, Little Arliss catches on to what is happening and starts screaming. He starts throwing rocks at Burn Sanderson and one hits the horse, which makes him buck and then Old Yeller starts barking. After the commotion settles down, Burn Sanderson smiles at Travis and Mama who are holding back Little Arliss. He gets off of his horse to speak to Little Arliss. The two come to an agreement. Little Arliss can keep Old Yeller if Little Arliss can talk Mama into giving Burn Sanderson a home cooked meal. Travis is so happy that he runs off and cries with relief.

Mama cooks a big, wonderful meal. After talking and thanking Mama, Sanderson asks Travis to come with him for a moment. Sanderson tells Travis of the plague of hydrophobia that is going around. He warns Travis to shoot anything that acts unnatural, such as any wild animal that fights instead of runs away. Don't let them bite or scratch because then it is too late. Travis is scared but assures Sanderson he will watch for any signs so that he can protect his family. Sanderson puts his hand on Travis's shoulder like Papa did when he left. Travis is so worried about the hydrophobia that he forgets to thank him for letting them keep Old Yeller.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Searcy is the one to tell Burn Sanderson that Old Yeller is at Travis's settlement, which makes Travis mad. Again it is Searcy bringing bad news to the family. Sanderson is kind and in some ways like Papa. He sees the value of a good dog and takes Travis aside like a man to tell him of the hydrophobia plague. The reader learns the danger of hydrophobia as Travis learns it, which increases the tension of the novel. Sanderson also honors the code of the frontier by being fair and honest when he trades a meal for Old Yeller with Little Arliss. Sanderson is different from Searcy in this way because he is trading something of value for his dinner and not just bad news.





# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Travis doesn't sleep the first night after Sanderson tells him about the hydrophobia plague, but the next day he heads out to round up and mark hogs and forgets all about the plague. The hogs are turned out onto the range to fend for themselves, just like the cattle, and they do things as a herd to protect themselves. The hogs eat plants and berries but also meat, such as a newborn calf if the mama cow could not keep them away. Hogs will attack humans for meat, and this is why Mama is afraid of wild hogs. Travis heads out to mark all the pigs the sows had the previous year, and Mama is nervous. Travis assures her that he has Old Yeller but she still worries about Travis getting cut up by the hogs.

A cornered hog is dangerous because they will kill if they can reach a human.

Travis is aware of all this but is not worried about the job at hand. He and Papa had developed a foolproof way to mark and castrate hogs without bothering the meat eating older hogs. Travis would just need Old Yeller to help him get the hogs where he wanted them. After locating some of his hogs, Travis tells Old Yeller to get them. Old Yeller catches a little pig, but lets him go when the group turns on and chases him. He runs slowly back to Travis so that the pigs chase him. When they form a tight circle to fight off Travis and Old Yeller, Old Yeller gets in their faces and pesters them until they cannot stand it anymore and they charge at him again.

Old Yeller stays just beyond their reach and keeps leading the hogs along to the place Travis wants to mark them. Travis picks an old oak tree with a branch sticking out to one side. He climbs up the tree so he is out of reach of the bigger, meaner hogs and has Old Yeller bring the hogs in so they are below him. When one of the little pigs goes under his branch he ropes it and pulls it into his lap. Then he marks the pig by cutting its ear a certain way. The mark is overbit the right and underslope the left. Each settler's mark is different so that they can tell the hogs apart. The pig squealing and the blood from the castration makes the hogs below Travis angry and they circle the tree and tear up the trunk trying to get to him. One by one Travis ropes the pigs and marks them. The hogs try to charge Old Yeller but he just runs off and then circles back. Soon Travis finishes the job but it takes another hour for the hogs to leave the tree because they are so mad. Finally it is safe for him to come down.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Travis still admits to a being a boy because the hydrophobia plague does not stay on his mind like it should have. The detailed description of the danger of angry hogs, the constant referral to their meanness throughout the chapter, and the fact that Mama is afraid of them foreshadows Travis and Old Yeller getting hurt. Travis is very





conscientious of the danger but he works the hogs like he and Papa would have. Marking the hogs is another obstacle Travis must face, but he feels confident since he is able to do it like Papa did. Travis looks to his father for guidance by behaving like he believes Papa would. He and Papa were a team marking the hogs before, and now he and Old Yeller are a team.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Travis keeps a piece of ear from every pig he marks, so that he knows if he has found all of his hogs. He believes he has found and marked all the hogs when Bud Searcy visits and tells them about a bunch of hogs missed back in the bat cave country. Travis has never been there before, but Papa has talked about it and he believes he can find it. Travis and Old Yeller head out the next morning. Travis talks of enjoying far and wild places. He describes swallow nests on the underside of a cliff on Salt Branch and heron nests in tall trees in a deep canyon where catfish swim on the sandy bottom of a pool of clear water. He likes these places and hopes to feel the same way about seeing the bats come out of their caves before nightfall once he is done with the hogs. He mentions as foreshadowing that after he is done with the hogs the last thing he wants to do is see the bats or anything else.

Travis and Old Yeller get on the hogs' trail at a water hole then on to the prickly-pear flats where the hogs have been eating and finally Travis and Old Yeller catch up to them. The sows are the wearing Travis's mark and there are five little pigs to mark. Travis tries to get the hogs over to a mesquite tree with Old Yeller but the hogs stop and hide underneath a dirt bank in a cave. No matter how Old Yeller barks at them they do not come out, and if one of the old hogs did he would not pursue Old Yeller to the tree.

Travis decides to use the dirt bank above the cave like he would a tree. He lies on his stomach and reaches under to rope a pig. He marks him and lets him go and when another little pig moves out from the back of the cave he makes a grab for him with the rope. The dirt bank breaks beneath his weight and he falls down on top of the angry hogs. Because the sand crumbles down on the hogs first, Travis is able to jump up and try to run. He is not fast enough and a tush slashes his right calf open. The pain makes him scream as well as the fact that he knows he cannot get up fast enough to get away from the killer hogs.

Old Yeller jumps in and saves Travis. He flings himself between Travis and the hogs snarling and barking while taking the slashes from the hog's tushes so that Travis can get away. Travis takes his chance and runs until he trips over a stick and comes to his senses. He looks at his leg and sees it is bleeding and cut to the bone. He wraps his leg with a strip from his shirt and turns back around to find Old Yeller. The hogs are gone and Travis finds Old Yeller hiding under a slab of rock, after Old Yeller whines as Travis walks by. Travis coaxes him out from under the rock and Old Yeller tries to lick Travis's hog cut leg. Travis looks at Old Yeller's wounds and feels tears in his eyes.

Old Yeller is bleeding from a dozen wounds and his belly is torn open revealing his intestines. Travis braces himself from the horror of it, tucks Old Yeller's entrails back in his stomach and wraps him up tight with his shirt. Old Yeller is silent until Travis moves him back under the rock. Travis cannot carry him home and he must keep Old Yeller



from trying to follow him. He moves an uprooted mesquite tree stump over the opening and believes Old Yeller will be safe until he can come back with Mama. Travis promises Old Yeller he will return and he starts running home, limping, with Old Yeller howling mournfully from beneath the rock.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

The moment between Travis and Old Yeller when Travis cares for him and ensures his safety under the rock is intimate and emotional, and in some ways is the climax of the relationship between the two. Travis vows to return and bring him home just as Old Yeller put aside his life for the protection of Travis from the hogs. By seeing the scene through Travis's view, the reader is let into this intimate sharing and one's hope rises with Travis's. Travis is hopeful of Old Yeller's survival as he bandages him; this is not like how he feels at the end of the novel when he knows there is no hope for Old Yeller. The themes of the novel converge as Travis works to do the right thing and save Old Yeller, treating him as the trusted friend he is.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

By the time Travis gets home he is weak and hot and trembling all over. His leg twitches and Mama begins to doctor his leg with hot water and turpentine and wraps it with clean bandages. Travis worries about Old Yeller and keeps telling Mama they have to go and get him but she says he will not be able to move on that leg for a week. Travis, stunned, stands up and tells Mama he is heading back for Old Yeller because he promised. By the time he gets Jumper caught Mama is ready to go with her bonnet on. Mama figures out a way in her mind to bring Old Yeller home without Travis having to hold him on Jumper, and she straps pillows and the cowhide to Jumper's back. Little Arliss rides behind Travis on Jumper, and Mama walks.

When Travis, Mama and Little Arliss reach the bat country, buzzards are gathering in the sky. Travis and Mama worry that Old Yeller may be dead but when they move down into the prickly-pear flats the buzzards are being spooked by something and Travis can hear Old Yeller barking weakly. When Travis reaches Old Yeller there is a crazy light shining in his eyes and he growls until he realizes it is Travis. Old Yeller settles down and Mama and Travis pull him out from the rock to look at his wounds. Little Arliss is scared and asks what is wrong with Old Yeller. Mama takes him aside and tells him to go and catch her a pretty green lizard out of the sandy wash. Little Arliss is surprised and off he goes. Travis realizes Mama has sent Little Arliss away so he cannot see the awful sight of Old Yeller's cut up belly. Mama tells Travis to get a hair from Jumper's tail and she uses it with a needle she brought to sew up Old Yeller. Travis knows Old Yeller must be in pain but he just licks Travis's hands as she sews.

Little Arliss shows back up with a lizard just as they are wrapping Old Yeller in clean rags. Mama, though squeamish about lizards and bugs, picks up Little Arliss's lizard to admire it and then asks him to keep it until they get home. She tells Little Arliss they are playing a game that Old Yeller is sick and he must hold on to Old Yeller on the cowhide that they are going to drag behind Jumper. Mama arranges it with the pillows and they lift Old Yeller onto the cowhide and then place Little Arliss where he can hold Old Yeller. They tie the cowhide onto Jumper's neck and shoulders so that he can pull it, and Travis rides Jumper and Mama leads him. Jumper tries to throw a fit at first but Travis whacks him with a dead stick between the ears and he is good the rest of the way home. Little Arliss enjoys the ride home, but for the rest of them it is long and rocky. They stopped periodically to rest Old Yeller when he begins to whine from the pain and to give him water. Finally, they get to the cabin at dark and Travis's leg is swollen and painful. He is so happy, however, that they have brought Old Yeller home alive and he sees Old Yeller licking Little Arliss's face, who is asleep.



## Chapter 11 Analysis

Travis plans to return after Mama has doctored his leg because he made the promise to Old Yeller. Mama realizes his seriousness and returns with him. Travis is acting like a man fulfilling a promise even though he himself is injured. But this time he is not thinking about being a man like he did earlier when he was chopping wood or chasing coons. Now he is acting on his own feelings, enhancing the coming of age theme. Mama still protects Little Arliss from the facts of life by sending him off while they sew up Old Yeller. This major difference between Little Arliss and Travis also displays the difference between a man and boy. Rescuing Old Yeller as a family further shows the family's love for the dog, and that survival of one can mean the survival of the other. Though Travis is in pain when they return home, he is so happy to have everyone there together.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Travis and Old Yeller are laid up for the next few weeks. Travis is in his bed and Old Yeller is in the dog run. The two are in pain and have fevers and Mama brings Travis cold water and makes prickly-pear root poultices for his leg. Mama doctors Old Yeller's wounds as well and she tries to get the two to eat when they can. Along with taking care of Travis and Old Yeller, Mama is also doing all the other chores such as milking, cutting wood, washing clothes, and taking care of Little Arliss. A drought has settled over the country and the land is dry. Jumper starts to eat the corn they have not been able to gather and Mama has to run him out of the corn field so he will not eat up all the bread corn for winter. Mama ties a chunk of wood to Jumper to keep him from jumping the fence into the corn. Little Arliss is too little to help with the chores and he gets lonesome without Old Yeller or Travis to play with.

Finally, Bud Searcy and Lisbeth show up with a puppy. Travis hears Mama talking to Searcy and he is mad at him for coming since he will just sit in the dog run and visit and then expect Mama to make him a nice meal. Lisbeth comes in to visit Travis and asks if his leg hurts. He does not want to admit his pain and says he doing all right. She says she has brought him a surprise and announces it is one of Miss Prissy's pups as she pulls a little speckled puppy out from behind her back. Lisbeth says he was the best one since she could hold him by the slack hide of his neck. Travis says he knows Little Arliss will like the puppy and realizes he has said the wrong thing and hurt Lisbeth's feelings. Lisbeth goes outside and gives the speckled pup to Little Arliss.

Travis is mad at himself and at Lisbeth for looking at him like she does, but he feels he already has a dog and when they are both better he and Old Yeller will not have the time to wait around for a puppy. The puppy is better off with Little Arliss since it will keep him occupied. He frets over it all day but Lisbeth does not come back to talk to him. Travis hears Searcy and Lisbeth leaving and when Lisbeth walks by his door she looks in at him. Travis suddenly feels mean and wishes he could think of the right thing to say regarding the puppy. Searcy tells Mama that with her man gone and Travis crippled he is going to leave Lisbeth to help them out with chores. Mama is worried she is too little to take on such work but Searcy convinces her that Lisbeth is tough and willing. Mama tries to argue but Searcy just tells Lisbeth to be good and rides away.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Travis feels guilty having Mama doing all the work and worries about it while he lies in bed in pain. He hurts Lisbeth's feeling and then gets mad at her, but really his anger is a result of being in bed, at Searcy for coming, and at the fact that she would give him another dog when he already has one. Travis claims Old Yeller as his dog, and Little Arliss does not know the difference when Lisbeth gives the speckled pup to him. The



dog Travis hated at first he now claims as his own. Later on, Travis feels mean about hurting Lisbeth's feelings. Searcy has finally done his first nice thing by leaving Lisbeth to help out.



# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Travis agrees with Mama that Lisbeth is too little to help, but Lisbeth proves them both wrong. She does all the chores well without being told. She is willing and always looks for ways to help out. Together she and Mama head to the field to gather corn in a cart strapped to Jumper. Gathering corn is a hot job that Travis usually does not like, but upon seeing Mama, Lisbeth, and Little Arliss out there picking corn and laughing, he wishes he could be out there as well. Travis says his pride is a little hurt since a little girl is able to come in and take over his jobs. Still, he reasons, she cannot mark hogs or kill meat. Soon, Travis narrates, a bigger trouble comes that tests them all.

The first sign of trouble is when the Spot heifer does not show up for her evening milking. Spot returns home in the morning bawling and Travis recognizes her voice. He is weak but is starting to feel better and is able to notice things. Travis calls to Mama that Spot is coming in. Mama goes out to the cowpen to let her in but soon Travis hears Mama shouting in fear and runs back to the house with Lisbeth and Little Arliss. The Spot heifer turned on her and tried to fight her. When Mama peeks out of the door she sees Spot is not paying any attention to her calf. Mama thinks maybe she has eaten a poisonous plant called pea-vine and that has made her crazy. Travis reasons that the pea-vine is dead this time of year and then wonders aloud if cows can get hydrophobia. The family is worried and decides to watch and wait. Old Yeller and Travis heal quickly.

For days and nights the Spot heifer goes around bawling and walking in a wide circle around the house and then out to the hills. Then the roan bull comes around doing the same thing, only he is worse. He wobbles and walks with his head low now and falls down. Travis sees him from the porch where he and Old Yeller are resting. The bull is heading towards the spring where Little Arliss and Lisbeth are playing. Old Yeller rises for the first time since he got hurt and he growls at the bull letting Travis know they are in grave danger.

Travis realizes that both Spot and this roan bull have hydrophobia and are deathly sick. He calls for Mama to bring his gun. When Mama realizes what is happening she does not get the gun but heads for the creek after Little Arliss and Lisbeth. The bull hears Mama and turns on her, but the sickness has made him too weak and he stumbles to the ground. Old Yeller barks at the bull on the ground and Travis gets his gun and shoots it.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Lisbeth proves that things are not always what they seem when she turns out to be a hardy worker. Travis is upset that a little girl has taken over his chores but points out to himself that she still cannot do the hard things that he has like kill meat and mark hogs.





When the Spot heifer comes home sick, Travis and Mama try to reason out their worst fears by saying it is the pea-vine that has poisoned her, but Travis realizes they cannot hide behind such a false truth. This is true, especially since Old Yeller rises and snarls at the danger of the sickness in the roan bull. Travis at last realizes the truth through the eyes of Old Yeller and knows what he must do to protect his family. He cannot look to Papa for guidance on this since this is a horror new to the family so it rest on Travis's shoulders to make things safe.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Travis and Mama cannot leave the dead roan bull, filled with sickness, so close to the house because it might contaminate the drinking water. Mama says they have to burn the carcass so that the sickness does not spread. Mama harnesses Jumper to pull away the bull but the weight is too much for him and he cannot budge it. Since the carcass cannot be moved, they will have to burn it where it is. There is no wood close to the house so Mama and Lisbeth must go far out into the woods to gather some. They drag in big logs pulled by Jumper. Travis helps them pile the logs onto the carcass and then they set it on fire. Even though it is the biggest fire Travis has ever seen, it does not burn up half of the roan bull so Mama and Lisbeth head back out to get more wood taking them a total of two day and nights to get the job done.

Wolves smell the meat and come close to the fire at night howling and snarling. They are afraid of the fire, however, and do not come too close. Old Yeller warns the wolves with his barking to keep away as he walks back and forth between the house and the fire. Travis watches the wolves' eyes, thinks about Bud Searcy's uncle who contracted hydrophobia, and wishes Papa would come home.

After the roan bull is completely burned, Mama says they must do the same thing for the Spot heifer. Travis can tell Mama does not want to give up and looks more tired than he has ever seen her. Mama and Travis worry that since one cow contracted hydrophobia, then all the cows might get it. Travis says his leg is getting better and goes out to shoot Spot by following her out so she is closer to some wood. He stays a safe distance behind her and once she reaches a sandy wash where the fire will not set the rest of the woods on fire, he gets ahead of her and shoots her. Travis is drained from the effort of following Spot and is tired and trembling when he returns home. Mama tells him to stay off his leg and then she and Lisbeth head out to start gathering wood for Spot's fire. Old Yeller gets up and follows them, even though he is still crippled. Travis wishes he could have done something to keep them all at home once he knows what will happen next.

Travis dozes for a while and wakes to see the speckled pup and Little Arliss playing in the yard with a piece of rope. Travis wonders what is taking Mama and Lisbeth so long but realizes it is a long way to the cow and would take a long time to drag up enough wood to burn her. Travis heads to get some fresh water from the spring and realizes it is about the time of year that Papa will return. He is curious about the horse he may get but mainly just wants Papa home because of the hydrophobia plague. He feels he has handled things fine up until the point of this plague came along.



## Chapter 14 Analysis

The fear and tension of the plague is building. The mention of wolves at the fire is foreshadows what will happen to Old Yeller. The nerves of Mama and Travis are on edge as they worry and the three themes of the novel are being tested. The family works together to survive the plague by burning the carcasses and Travis is faced with something he must handle without the set forth guidance from Papa. Travis is wavering as to whether he is doing a good enough job protecting his family, and these are the feelings of a man rather than the flippant feelings of a boy. Mama and Lisbeth are also doing their best to ensure survival as they head far out into the woods to gather logs for the fire.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Darkness falls and Travis is more worried about Mama and Lisbeth. He knows it would have taken them a long time to get everything done that they needed to do, plus they had a distance to travel. He cannot think of any real danger befalling them, especially since Old Yeller is with them. Travis wants to see what is keeping them, but he needs to feed Little Arliss, who is getting fussy and tired. He takes Little Arliss and the speckled pup inside and feeds them two bowls of milk and cornbread that they eat together. Travis is just about to put Little Arliss to bed when he hears dogs fighting. He runs to the door and hears the sound coming closer to the cabin. Travis recognizes Old Yeller's voice, then he hears Mama yell for him to make a light and get his gun.

Travis gets his gun and makes a small fire out of some half dried bear grass that he knows will produce a bright light. Once he gets the fire going he stands back with his gun ready. In the light he sees Old Yeller fighting with something as big as he is, and Mama calls to him that it is a mad loafer wolf. Travis's heart almost quits. He cannot believe crippled Old Yeller is fighting a savage wolf, especially one gone mad. Travis yells at Mama to get to the cabin so she and Lisbeth are not in the line of fire, but even after he knows they are out of the way he cannot shoot for fear of hitting Old Yeller. Then the wolf has Old Yeller in a throat hold, and is on top of him. Travis takes aim through the smoky light and shoots. He hears the growling stop and runs toward the shapes on the ground. Old Yeller starts licking his hand and Travis is so relieved he sinks to the ground petting Old Yeller. Mama comes and sits next to him.

Mama tells him about how it had taken a long time to get the wood and then get the fire going, just like Travis had assumed. Upon returning to the cabin they stopped at Birdsong Creek to get a drink and the wolf came bounding at them. Mama barely had time to get up from drinking and hit him in the head with a stick before he would have gotten to her. Then Old Yeller was also there, fighting the wolf. Mama and Lisbeth got on Jumper and headed as fast as they could for the house with the wolf chasing them. Old Yeller could not stop him because he was too weak, but he put up a good enough fight to keep the wolf away from the two women. Mama concludes that the wolf must have been mad to come at them like that. Travis is glad Old Yeller was there and shudders to think what could have happened.

Mama suddenly realizes the truth and says, "It was a good thing for us, Son; but it wasn't good for Old Yeller." When Travis realizes what Mama is saying he jumps to his feet. He argues that Old Yeller has saved each of their lives. Mama puts her arm around his shoulders and helps him to see the facts. A mad wolf has bitten Old Yeller. Travis tries to argue again that they do not know for sure and Mama starts to cry. She says she cannot take the chance that it could be one of them next and offers to shoot Old Yeller for Travis. Travis knows she is right and he walks away from her, calls Old Yeller, and shoots him in the head.



## Chapter 15 Analysis

The irony is that Travis worries about shooting Old Yeller when he is fighting with the wolf and in the end he has to shoot the dog because he has been bitten. Old Yeller has now saved all of them from a grave danger: Little Arliss from the bear, Travis from the hogs, and Mama and Lisbeth from the wolf. All of these were creatures Old Yeller could fight and protect the family from. Old Yeller makes the sacrifice of attacking a mad wolf to protect Lisbeth and Mama. He cannot protect them from himself, now that he could be infected with hydrophobia. Travis has to make the choice between the survival of his family and his loyalty to Old Yeller. Travis feels that this sacrifice should not go unpaid, that they should wait and see if Old Yeller is sick, but Mama thinks practically and knows the truth and ultimately, so does Travis. Family must come first.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Travis is devastated by the loss of Old Yeller. He cannot eat or sleep or cry. He feels empty and hurt. Travis thinks of all the things Old Yeller did for the family. Mama tries to make him feel better by talking about it, but Travis still feels dead inside. Lisbeth points out that the speckled pup is part Old Yeller but Travis thinks that the speckled pup did not save all of their lives and then get shot like he did not mean anything. Rain comes and washes away the hydrophobia plague.

The next morning Papa comes home. He is thin, but happy to have cash money and a horse for Travis. Papa is proud of the horse and Travis agrees that he is a dandy, but he is still sad over the death of Old Yeller to be happy about the horse. Papa realizes something is wrong and asks Mama about it later. Before supper he walks with Travis down to the spring and says he knows about Old Yeller. Papa tells Travis he is proud of him and that he "couldn't ask any more of a grown man." Then Papa tells him he has to go on with his life and look at the good parts, because if he focuses on the bad parts of life that will make life all bad. Travis understands but he still feels empty.

A week later, Travis is heading out to feed the horses when he hears Mama yelling at the speckled pup. He has stolen a piece of cornbread and is squealing like someone is beating him. Inside the house, Travis can hear Little Arliss screaming mad because Mama hit the pup; Papa is laughing. Something loosens inside of Travis and he begins to feel better. Later after he returns from riding his horse, which he is starting to enjoy, he sees Little Arliss stripped naked playing with the speckled pup in the drinking water. Travis starts to yell at them, but then he starts laughing and laughs till he cries. After he cannot cry or laugh anymore he puts his horse away and then decides that tomorrow he will take Little Arliss and the speckled pup on a squirrel hunt. If the pup is going to start acting like Old Yeller, then he is probably big enough to start earning his keep.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Travis is grieving for Old Yeller when Papa returns. Even though Papa brings him a horse, and that is what he wanted when Papa left, Travis has changed. In a sense he has made the journey in becoming a man much like Papa made the journey to Abilene and back. Papa comes back externally different by being thin, but Travis has changed internally by making the choices he did to ensure his family's safety and survival. Papa tells Travis he has become a man by the obstacles he has overcome. Papa also wants Travis to focus on the good in life and not the bad, or he will grieve forever. Travis understands and when he sees the speckled pup act like Old Yeller he feels something loosen in him and he begins to heal. By planning on taking Little Arliss and the speckled pup squirrel hunting, Travis is allowing both them and himself to enjoy the goodness of life.



# Characters

## Travis

Travis is Mama and Papa's son and Little Arliss's brother. He is fourteen-years-old and the main character of the story. The novel is told from Travis's point of view so the reader sees the change that occurs as Travis becomes a man. Gipson uses Travis to tell the story in an exciting and riveting way with the language of the times and the complex feelings of a boy coming of age.

Travis must take care of his home and family when Papa leaves on the cattle drive. He has many responsibilities to ensure they are provided for such as protecting the corn, chopping wood, milking cows, shooting deer meat, and marking hogs. His father has faith in him and Travis is confident that he is man enough for the job. Travis first tests his authority on Little Arliss when he catches him in the drinking water and Mama tells Little Arliss he must listen to his older brother. Travis handles the chores all right and believes he can handle what comes along with Papa gone.

Old Yeller steals meat the next day and Travis is mad but Mama thinks Little Arliss should keep Old Yeller. Travis reacts with anger to a lot of situations. Sometimes the anger is a mask for another feeling, and sometimes the anger is just an immature way to handle the situation. Travis's angry reactions will dissipate as the novel goes on, bringing him closer to manhood.

Travis shoots a deer for the family by killing it while it was running away. He learned to hunt from Papa and throughout the novel Travis will look back on previous advice from this father on different obstacles that must be overcome. He still does not like Old Yeller and his feelings are confirmed more when he returns home to find Little Arliss and Old Yeller in the drinking water and then when Old Yeller does not chase the fighting bulls away when asked.

When Old Yeller saves Little Arliss from the bear Travis begins to accept Old Yeller into the family. Old Yeller does for Little Arliss what Travis wishes he could have done if he had gotten there fast enough. Travis realizes he loves his little brother, no matter how pesky he is, and that he owes his brother's life to Old Yeller.

Old Yeller and Travis further their bond by handling the chores together. Travis likes the company of Old Yeller and is beginning to have faith in him. Travis uses Old Yeller to chase coons, help him get the Spot heifer and her calf and make Spot stand to be milked. Travis begins to see that Papa was right by saying Travis needed a good dog.

Travis and Old Yeller work as a team to mark the hogs, but when Travis falls on the angry hogs, Old Yeller rescues him. Travis shows his love for Old Yeller by caring for him after he is injured and then returning with Mama. He promises Old Yeller he will return and he does. The fulfillment of the promise is something a man would do, but



Travis no longer revels in the confidence of handling things while Papa is gone. He is just happy to have everybody home safe and sound.

Travis likes Lisbeth but when he hurts her feelings over refusing the speckled pup he reacts with anger. He claims Old Yeller as his dog now and Little Arliss does not know the difference because Lisbeth gives the speckled pup to him.

Travis has to stand up to the task of protecting his family when their cattle contract hydrophobia. He must shoot the roan bull and he also shoots the Spot heifer. He sees the truth through Old Yeller's eyes that the sickness is upon them when the roan bull comes into the clearing and Old Yeller growls. In the end Travis has to make the choice between the safety of his family and his loyalty to Old Yeller. He cannot risk letting Old Yeller infect the family so he must shoot Old Yeller in the head.

When Papa returns he says Travis is a man because of the way he handled things while he was gone. Travis decides to take his father's advice to see the good in life when he sees the speckled pup in the drinking water with Little Arliss. He wants to take them squirrel hunting the next day, a sign he is healing.

Travis is a strong, smart, capable person. He overcomes many obstacles in the novel to protect and provide for his family. He is likeable and brings the reader into his thoughts and feelings with the easy yet riveting way he tells the story.

## Old Yeller

Old Yeller is a big yellow dog with slick hair, a chewed off ear, and a stub tail. He comes and steals meat from Travis that is hanging in the dog run and then stays there where Travis catches him the next morning. Travis does not like him at first because he steals the meat, but Little Arliss claims him as his own and Mama lets Little Arliss keep him. Old Yeller plays with Little Arliss but does not steal meat again, even after Travis baits him with the doe meat. Travis catches Old Yeller and Little Arliss in the drinking water and when he throws rocks at Old Yeller, Little Arliss fights back by protecting Old Yeller and throwing rocks at Travis. Old Yeller barks at the fighting bulls and after Travis gets mad at him he will not return to chase them away when Travis asks him too. This is another reason Travis does not like him but after Old Yeller rescues Little Arliss from the bear Travis begins to see him in a different light.

Soon Old Yeller is helping Travis with the daily chores and activities. Travis begins to have faith in him and Old Yeller responds to this newfound faith by treeing turkeys, chasing raccoons and skunks out of the corn, and bringing home the Spot heifer and making her stand to be milked. Travis soon becomes dependent on Old Yeller and uses him to help him mark hogs. Old Yeller and Travis are a team. After Old Yeller rescues Travis from the hogs and is injured himself, Travis promises to return for him and goes home and gets Mama so that he can doctor Old Yeller and bring him home.

Old Yeller recuperates but is ready to protect his family from the first sign of danger, which is when the roan bull comes into the clearing with hydrophobia. Travis sees the





danger through Old Yeller's eyes since he trusts him now. Old Yeller, by some sixth sense, goes with Mama and Lisbeth and ends up saving them from the wolf. Even though he is still crippled from hogs, he fights the wolf. This is the ultimate sacrifice because Old Yeller gives his life to protect the family. Travis has to shoot him since the diseased wolf bit him.

Old Yeller is so loyal that he will do anything to save his family. He fights adversaries stronger than he is and works hard to help Travis with his jobs. Old Yeller loves the family equally, and in the end gives his life for their safety.

## Little Arliss

Little Arliss is Travis's brother and Mama and Papa's son. He is five-years-old. He is pesky and mischievous. He helps provide comic relief for the story by aggravating Travis, catching bugs and lizards to put in his pockets and by playing in the drinking water naked. He claims Old Yeller as his dog when Old Yeller first comes to the cabin and Mama sides with him allowing him to keep Old Yeller. Little Arliss throws rocks at his brother for throwing rocks at Old Yeller. Old Yeller rescues Little Arliss from the mother bear after Little Arliss makes her mad by holding on to her cub's leg. It seems appropriate that Old Yeller rescues Little Arliss first since Little Arliss loved him on sight. Little Arliss makes a trade of a good meal for Old Yeller after Burn Sanderson comes to claim him and Little Arliss throws rocks at Sanderson's horse. Lisbeth gives Little Arliss the speckled pup after Travis tells her to. Little Arliss playing in the drinking water with Old Yeller and then with the speckled pup helps Travis see the good in life.

## Mama

Mama is married to Papa and is Travis's and Little Arliss's mother. She stays home with the boys when Papa goes on the cattle drive. She is practical and competent in the wilderness. Her authority has the final say in what happens around the house when the boys fight. It is Mama who decides that Old Yeller will stay. Mama loves her children and is so relieved she cries when Old Yeller saves Little Arliss from the bear. She also cries for Travis and offers to shoot Old Yeller if he cannot after the mad wolf bites the dog. Travis needs Mama to help him when Old Yeller gets cut by hogs and she sews him up and helps bring him home. Her practical thinking creates the cow hide sled for bringing Old Yeller home and helps to get Little Arliss's mind away from the brutality of Old Yeller's wounds by sending him to find a green lizard.

Mama takes care of Travis and Old Yeller at home after they are hog cut and has to do all the chores as well. She does not complain but Travis can tell she is worried and tired. This makes him feel guilty so he is glad when she has some help from Lisbeth, even if it means a little girl is doing the chores he would be doing if he was not laid up.

Mama is the last member of the family Old Yeller rescues. He saves her from the attacking mad wolf. It is Mama who realizes first that Old Yeller could be infected and tells Travis they have to shoot him. It was her choice to allow Old Yeller to stay at first



and she is the first one to realize that Old Yeller must be shot. Mama tells Papa about Old Yeller when he returns home.

## **Papa**

Papa is married to Mama and is Travis's and Little Arliss's father. He leaves at the beginning of the novel on a cattle drive to Abilene and returns at the end after Old Yeller is killed. His leaving and returning frames the story of. Papa is a sort of heroic figure since throughout the novel Travis remembers his advice about things to accomplish the tasks at hand. Travis hunts like Papa, does chores like Papa, and marks hogs like Papa. Papa offers final advice upon his return at the end of the novel by telling Travis he must focus on the good things in life which helps Travis to see the speckled pup in a new light.

## **Lisbeth**

Lisbeth is Bud Searcy's granddaughter. She is eleven, has white blond hair, and big solemn eyes that Travis says go right through him. Lisbeth's kindness counteracts the bad habits of her grandfather. Lisbeth comes to visit with her grandpa and warns Travis that Old Yeller is the one stealing from the settlement. She also tells him Miss Prissy, her dog, is going to have Old Yeller's pups. Lisbeth brings one of these pups to help cheer up Travis after he is hog cut but he tells her to give it to Arliss and hurts her feelings. Lisbeth stays to help out with chores while Travis is recuperating and the mad loafer wolf attacks her and Mama.

## **Bud Searcy**

Searcy is a settler at Salt Licks who does not go on the cattle drive to Abilene and claims he is there to look after the women and children of the settlement. He talks a lot, spits tobacco juice all over the place, and is always waiting for someone to ask him to dinner. Searcy brings bad news with him when he comes to visit. He tells them of the hydrophobia and how his uncle was infected with it, he tells of how someone is stealing in the settlement and will most likely be shot, and he brings the news that Travis has missed hogs in the bat country. Searcy is Lisbeth's grandfather and he leaves her with Mama to help out with the chores after Travis gets hog-cut.

## **Burn Sanderson**

Old Yeller's original owner. Sanderson is young and polite and rides a good horse. He calls Mama "Mrs. Coates." He has some cattle he is grazing and was using dogs to help him since he did not have money for riders. Old Yeller had disappeared on him. When he goes to leave with Old Yeller Little Arliss throws rocks at him. Sanderson makes a deal with Little Arliss that he can keep Old Yeller if Mama will cook him supper.



Sanderson tells Travis to be on the lookout for unusual acting animals since there have been some cases of hydrophobia.

## **Bell**

Bell was Travis's first dog and he was killed the previous summer when he was bitten by a rattlesnake. Travis swears he does not want a new dog after Bell is killed, only a horse of his own.

## **Jumper**

Jumper is the Travis's family's mule. He helps with all the plowing and hauling. He pulls Old Yeller home on the cow hide when the hogs cut up Old Yeller. Jumper gets into the corn when the grass dries up and Mama ties a drag to him to keep him from jumping the fence. Jumper hauls the wood for the fires when they burn the carcasses of the cattle with hydrophobia.

## **Rose**

Rose is the name of an old longhorn milk cow.

## **The Spot Heifer**

Rose's calf is the Spot Heifer. Mama hopes she will be a good milking cow to take over Rose's job since Rose is getting old. The Spot heifer has a calf of her own and Travis has Old Yeller help him bring them home since the Spot heifer is so wild. Old Yeller makes her stand for milking by watching her in the pen. The Spot heifer is the first to get hydrophobia. Travis shoots her away from the house on some bare ground so Mama and Lisbeth can burn her. Mama and Lisbeth are returning from burning her carcass when the wolf attacks them.

## **Roany**

A roan colored range bull is called Roany. Travis sees this bull at the Salt Licks the day he goes to shoot the doe. Roany fights Chongo in front of Travis's cabin knocking down the fence and crashing into the cabin before Chongo flips him into the Mexican two-wheeled cart. After being dumped into the creek he runs into the woods. Roany appears again at the end of the novel when he comes to the cabin infected with hydrophobia and Travis has to shoot him. Mama and Lisbeth burn his carcass.



## Chongo

Chongo is a leggy, mustard-colored range bull with black freckles on his jaws and the underside of his belly. He has one normal horn and another one that falls down below his jaw giving him the name Chongo, or what Mexicans call a droop horn. Chongo fights Roany in front of Travis's cabin knocking down the fence and crashing into the cabin before he flips Roany into the Mexican two-wheeled cart. Chongo scratches his tongue on the cart's spinning wheel and runs away.

## Rosal (Jed Simpson's boy)

Rosal is a character the author uses to tell a story. He is one of the settler's sons. The danger of hogs is introduced when Travis tells the story of how Rosal shot into a group of hogs and they treed him in a mesquite tree. The hogs did not leave until sundown and had almost chewed through the bark of the tree. Bud Searcy tells the story of how a fox had jumped Rosal when he was sitting at a turkey roost and he had to club it to death with the butt of his gun. Searcy believes the fox had have hydrophobia to attack like that and this is the first the reader hears of hydrophobia in the novel. Rosal also is the one to find Travis's stray hogs in the bat country.

## Miss Prissy

Miss Prissy is a blue-ticked female dog that belongs to Lisbeth. She is the mother to the speckled pups conceived with Old Yeller. Travis believes she is one of Bell's pups.

## Speckled Pup

One of the speckled pups is a son of Miss Prissy and Old Yeller. Lisbeth brings the puppy to Travis when he is in bed recuperating from being hog cut, but then gives him to Little Arliss. The speckled pup is the one who brings Travis out of his grief over Old Yeller's death when he steals cornbread from Mama and then plays in the drinking water with Little Arliss.

## Range Hogs

Travis owns range hogs. They run on the range to survive and Travis marks the pigs once a year with the family's mark. These hogs will be meat for the family. When marking these hogs Travis gets his leg cut open when they attack him. Old Yeller gets his belly slit open when he jumps into save Travis.



## **Bear and Bear Cub**

The mother bear tries to attack Little Arliss when Little Arliss has a hold of the cub's hind leg. Old Yeller fights off the mother bear and Travis gets Little Arliss to let of the cub's leg. When Old Yeller saves Little Arliss from the bear Travis's feelings change towards him.

## **Wolf**

The wolf is a mad loafer. He attacks Mama and Lisbeth when they stop to get a drink at Birdsong Creek after burning the Spot heifer. Travis shoots him when he has a throat hold on Old Yeller, but Old Yeller is still bitten and most likely infected with hydrophobia.

## **Hydrophobia**

Hydrophobia is the name of Rabies, for which there is no cure for at the time. The plague of hydrophobia is introduced in the sixth chapter and hangs over the family like a sickness would for the rest of the novel. Finally the family is tested when some of their cattle get it and then a mad wolf with the disease bites Old Yeller.



# Objects/Places

## Birdsong Creek

Where Travis's family's settlement is. When Mama and Papa first came to settle they camped along the creek and the mockingbirds were singing and the bee myrtle was blooming. Mama liked it so much that she named it and told Papa they would build right there. It is here where Mama and Lisbeth stop for a drink of water after burning the Spot heifer and the mad wolf tries to get them.

## Dog Run

The area between the two rooms of the log cabin that is covered by a roof. Travis and his family use the area to hang meat and keep it cool. Since it is cool there it is a nice place to sit and visit or sleep in hot months. The day Papa leaves, Little Arliss is punished and has to sit in the dog run. Travis first finds Old Yeller in the dog run when he goes out to cut meat for breakfast only to find Old Yeller has eaten it. Old Yeller supposedly sleeps in the dog run before he starts sleeping with Travis and Little Arliss. It is where Bud Searcy sits when he comes to visit. Old Yeller recuperates in the dog run after getting cut up by the hogs.

## Drinking Water

A spring runs out of a cleft in the rock by Travis's house and forms a pothole of water the family uses as its drinking water. Little Arliss likes to play in it and this makes Travis mad since he is normally naked when he does. Little Arliss plays in there the day Papa leaves and Travis establishes his authority by yelling at him. Little Arliss and Old Yeller are playing in the drinking water when Travis returns from shooting the doe and it makes Travis angry again. At the end of the novel Travis finds Little Arliss and the speckled pup playing in the water and he begins to heal.

## Salt Licks

A collective term for the settlement area but more specifically it is a "scattered outcropping of dark rocks with black streaks in them." The Licks is where Travis goes to shoot the doe and the reader is introduced to the range cattle. All the animals come to lick the salt in the rocks in the morning and evening. This means predators, wild game and range livestock came through the area. Papa and Mama once broke up some of the rocks and boiled them in water to season their meat when they ran out of salt.



## Salt Branch

Another tributary of water where there are other settlements. It is in the same area of Texas as Birdsong Creek. Bud Searcy says Rosal found a few of Travis's stray hogs are on the other side of it, and Travis must go down and mark them. Travis talks of a place on Salt Branch he likes where birds build their nests under a cliff.

## Tush

The sharp tooth of a hog is called a tush. It is one of these teeth that cut open Travis's calf and also slices Old Yeller and splits open his stomach.

## Bat Cave Country/ Prickly Pear Flats

The bat cave country is where Bud Searcy says Rosal saw a band of hogs not marked that belong to Travis. It is on the other side of Salt Branch and a good distance from Travis's home. Travis and Old Yeller travel there to mark the hogs and locate them on the Prickly Pear Flats. After Travis and Old Yeller are injured, Travis has to leave Old Yeller there so he can go home and get Mama. Mama, Travis, and Little Arliss return with Jumper to the Prickly Pear Flats and bring Old Yeller home.

## Abilene, Kansas

Papa trails his cattle in Abilene with other Salt Licks settlers to sell them for cash.

## Horse

When Papa leaves for Abilene, Travis wants him to bring him back a horse. When Papa returns he has a blue roan horse, but Travis is grieving for Old Yeller and it takes him a little while to get excited about owning his own horse.

## Log Cabin

Travis and his family live in a log cabin.

# Setting

The very first pages of *Old Yeller* identify the setting as Salt Lick, Texas, hill country six hundred miles south of Abilene, Kansas, during the late 1860s.

This immediate and specific attention to setting suggests that the book is a work of regionalism, a kind of literature that vividly and accurately depicts a specific setting. The details portrayed in works of regionalism include descriptions of nature as well as the special customs, values, and even speech of the people in that setting. In such works, setting is such an important part of the story that the reader cannot imagine the events happening anywhere else.

Usually, regionalism rings true only when the author has actually lived in that special time and place. *Old Yeller*, though, is an important exception. Fred Gipson grew up in Texas, but he depicts a time forty years before he was born. As the dedication to the novel suggests, he bases his novel on stories his parents told him of their life in Texas in the late nineteenth century.

*Old Yeller* provides rich details about the hard life endured by the Coates family. Gipson describes special tasks farmers in the 1860s performed, such as making soap from wood ashes and hog fat, plowing corn fields with a mule, and branding wild hogs. Despite his emphasis on a particular setting, Gipson manages to create characters with universal appeal.





## Social Sensitivity

Old Yeller was published in 1956, before mainstream America began reexamining its position on the place of minorities and women in society. Gipson does not explicitly state his time's stereotypes of Native Americans and women, but readers may notice undercurrents of prejudice or bias in his characters. In Old Yeller, Native Americans are occasionally mentioned as one of the dangers facing settlers. Gipson himself treats the animosity between Native Americans and whites matter-of-factly and nowhere suggests that the white settlers have a God-ordained right to the land.

Travis's primary goal throughout Old Yeller is to show his parents, especially his father, that he has become a man.

Travis implicitly believes that men and women have different roles; this is an accurate enough assessment of nineteenth-century frontier society, where only men hunt and only women cook. But Travis's further assumption that men are better than women is gently shown to be wrong. Mama works just as hard as Travis does and is just as important to the family's survival. When Travis is hurt, Lisbeth takes over his chores and performs them well. Travis eventually learns that being a man is much more than getting older and working hard; it is also a matter of maintaining a belief in the fundamental goodness of life. This lesson about life, the reader should see, is one that not only males learn.

## Literary Qualities

Old Yeller is told from Travis's point of view as he recalls events of the late 1860s. Travis's recollection of the past is important for two reasons. First, it verifies that the lessons he learned about life when he was fourteen were influential and presumably affect his outlook on life as an adult. Second, it allows Travis to move back and forth in time. For example, in the second paragraph of the book, Travis describes both the day Old Yeller came to his family's farm and the day, weeks later, when he had to kill him. Alluding to the conclusion in the first chapter sacrifices some of the suspense, but it tightens the structure of the novel. Old Yeller has an episodic plot involving a series of loosely related stories revolving around the dog.

Often this kind of plot can be unsatisfying, since readers may feel they are on a journey to no particular destination.

But, partly because he provides the destination in the beginning of the book, Gipson produces a satisfying work of literature.

Old Yeller falls into the broad category of realism, a kind of literature that became important in the United States after the Civil War and that usually focuses on the lives of "ordinary" characters. Travis narrates the story in informal language, and many of the conversations in the book are in a modified dialect that gives the flavor of Texas speech. In a more sentimental work, Old Yeller would be miraculously saved from death; in Gipson's work of realism, however, the events described in the novel make the dog's death inevitable.



# Themes

## Coming of Age

Travis is fourteen-years-old when his father leaves on the cattle drive. His father feels that he is old enough to take care of the place and the family, but talks to Travis about all that he needs to do. After Papa leaves, Travis is certain that he can handle what comes his way. Throughout the novel, Travis deals with situations in the way he believes Papa would, or does a certain job like Papa has taught him in the past. By acting on what he has learned, Travis is able to provide and protect his family by chopping wood, chasing away the coons, shooting a deer for meat and marking the hogs. He expresses the confidence of youth. Becoming a man means proving your worth, and just like Old Yeller proves his worth to Travis by saving Little Arliss from the bear, Travis will prove his worth by saving his family from hydrophobia as well as providing for them.

The reader sees Travis beginning to act like a man when the hogs hurt Old Yeller. He simply gets the job done by bandaging him up, promising to return and then fulfilling that promise. When the hydrophobia plague comes Travis is worried because it is a new thing to the family and he cannot look back on past advice from Papa. Travis feels that the hydrophobia plague may be too much for him to handle, but the reader sees that Travis's uncertainty is a mature way to look at the situation. Upon having to shoot Old Yeller to save his family, Travis has made the decision of a man. When Papa returns he comments on how Travis behaved like a man by achieving all that he did while Papa was gone. The novel is brought full circle by this statement, and the reader sees that Travis has become a man through the novel's struggles.

## Survival

Papa has told Travis that to survive each animal has kill. There are many levels of survival in *Old Yeller*. Survival of the family is of utmost importance and Travis does everyday chores to ensure that, such as protecting the corn by killing coons and skunks so they will have bread in the winter, shooting a doe and turkey for meat to eat, and chopping down trees for wood and fences. When Papa left he had listed off these responsibilities to Travis and the reader is given a foreshadowing of what must be done to survive in the frontier.

The other animals in the novel have their own levels of survival as well. The coons are eating the corn for food, the turkey is eating the pea-vine for food, the mama bear is trying to protect her cub from Little Arliss, and the hogs are trying to protect themselves and their young from the threat of Travis and Old Yeller when the pigs are being marked.



Old Yeller fights three adversaries in the novel to ensure the family's survival. He battles the bear for Little Arliss, the hogs to save Travis, and the wolf to save Mama and Lisbeth. In Old Yeller's mind, protecting his family from danger is his job and he will help them survive no matter what the cost.

The chance of survival is diminished in the shadow of the hydrophobia plague. No living thing can survive it once they are bitten or scratched. Killing whatever is sick with it can only stop hydrophobia. Travis worries that since one of their cows got the sickness then all of them might, meaning they would lose precious meat and milk. This horrific enemy presents the final act of survival when Travis has to shoot Old Yeller to protect his family's lives.

## Family

Since the settlements are spread out during the frontier times, family is a very tight unit that works together to ensure the safety and survival of all. After Papa leaves, Travis is left with the responsibility of protecting and providing for his family. Travis realizes how much he loves his little brother Little Arliss when the mother bear tries to attack him. Old Yeller saving Little Arliss is enough for Travis to change his feeling towards the dog. Old Yeller goes on to become part of the family and to help the family in big and small ways. He assists Travis with everyday chores and problems, like chasing coons, treeing turkeys, rounding up livestock, and breaking a cow to milk. These are all things that help the family survive life in the frontier.

Old Yeller also saves each member of the family from grave dangers. He saves Little Arliss from the bear, Travis from the hogs, and Mama and Lisbeth from the mad wolf. All three of these adversaries are too much of a challenge for Old Yeller, but he fights them anyway. He is able to outrun the bear for he could never have killed her being a third of her size. He gets away from the hogs by crawling under a rock after they have cut him to pieces. He cannot escape what the wolf has done when the wolf bites him. Even though Old Yeller saved the family by sacrificing himself three different times, Travis knows that Old Yeller is a danger now since he might have hydrophobia. Travis must put his family first and he shoots Old Yeller to protect them.



## Themes/Characters

A major theme of this novel is the meaning of adulthood. When Papa leaves on a cattle drive, he tells Travis to "be the man of the family." That means, his father says, taking care of the family and doing his work before his mother tells him it needs to be done. As Travis soon discovers, maturation is not an overnight process. His five-year-old brother continues to defy him, and his mother scolds him as if he were a child when he bosses Little Arliss. The hardest lesson that Travis must learn about being an adult is that sorrow is an inevitable part of life. At the beginning of the novel, Travis does not want a dog because he felt too much grief when his dog Bell died from a rattlesnake bite.

Later, he finally accepts Old Yeller, only to have him die, too. Hoping to escape sorrow once more, Travis wants nothing to do with Yeller's pup. Travis's father, just back from the cattle drive, explains that he should not cut himself off from life to escape sorrow: "A part of the time, [life is] mighty good. And a man can't afford to waste all the good part, worrying about the bad parts." When Travis understands his father's point and commits himself to loving Old Yeller's pup, he finally reaches adulthood.

An underlying theme of *Old Yeller* is that people who live off the land have an ambivalent relationship with nature. On the one hand, nature is beautiful and generously provides the Coates family with plants and animals to eat, and wood for fuel and shelter. On the other hand, the Coateses have an adversarial relationship with the land, as nature constantly seeks to destroy their life on the farm. A bear nearly kills Little Arliss; raccoons eat the family's corn crops; wild hogs attack Travis; and a rabid wolf threatens Mama and Lisbeth, a girl from a neighboring farm. The family's relationship with nature differs greatly from the romantic view that humans should coexist with nature in spiritual harmony.

# Style

## Point of View

The story is narrated by Travis and is therefore told in first person. By seeing the story through Travis's point of view the reader is allowed Travis's feelings and this adds to the excitement, tension, and poignancy of the story. Since Travis is the main character and the one who undergoes a major internal change, following his thoughts add authenticity to the story. Travis leads the reader into each event that happens by offering a teaser as to what will happen next. Since he is recalling the story in his mind, the reader is curious to know what happens next and knows that Travis will soon say it.

## Setting

The setting is the settlement of Travis's family along Birdsong Creek in the hill country of Texas in the late 1860s. These are the years after the Civil War and Papa feels like they are living in the best of times with everything at their disposal to make a decent living. He feels all they need is cash money so he sets out to Abilene to acquire it through the sale of cattle.

Salt Licks, named for salt streaked rocks licked by animals, is the area around where Travis and his family live; there are other settlers in this same area. The settlements are spread out so a family must mostly provide for themselves. The frontier proves to be a wild and dangerous place despite Papa's confidence in the times. Survival in that era was hard due to the conditions and lack of modern conveniences. People made due with what they had at hand making them a hardy and competent group.

## Language and Meaning

Travis tells the story by using the language of the times. The title reflects this since the people of that era would have said the word "yeller" instead of "yellow," something Travis explains right away. The reader gets the feeling the narrator is looking back on the story and therefore he is able to add foreshadowing to the story by commenting on each event before it happens. This adds to the tension and excitability of the story since the reader's curiosity is piqued with the mentioning of each upcoming event. How the characters speak is a reflection of life on the frontier. They have names for things and places that sound foreign to modern ears, but they are easy to comprehend due to the context the narrator uses them. Explaining situations and items to the reader adds to the story and draws the reader into Travis's world.

## Structure

The novel is divided into sixteen chapters. The storyline follows when Old Yeller first comes into Travis's family's life through to when Old Yeller dies. The first and the last chapters frame the story with Papa leaving and then returning from the cattle drive to Abilene, Kansas. The novel moves along at a quick pace due to the easy language, excitement and tension. Gipson sometimes leaves off a chapter with a glimpse as to what will happen next, leading the reader along.



## Quotes

"He made me so mad at first that I wanted to kill him. Then, later, when I had to kill him, it was like having to shoot some of my own folks. That's how much I'd come to think of the big yeller dog." Chapter 1, pg. 1

"Still, they needed money, and they realized that whatever a man does, he's bound to take some risks." Chapter 1, pg. 3.

"He was a big ugly slick-haired yeller dog. One short ear had been chewed clear off and his tail had been bobbed so close to his rump that there was hardly stub enough left to wag." Chapter 2, pg. 16

"Now, Travis"," Mama said. 'You're not being fair. You had a dog when you were little, but Arliss has never had one. He's too little for you to play with, and he gets lonely.'" Chapter 2, pg. 19

"Arliss! I yelled at Little Arliss. 'You get that nasty old dog out of our drinking water!'" Chapter 3, pg. 30

"I knew then that I loved him as much as I did Mama and Papa, maybe in some ways even a little bit more." Chapter 6, pg. 59-60

"After all that, I guess you can see why I nearly died when a man rode up one day and claimed Old Yeller." Chapter 7, pg. 88

"Shoot anything that acts unnatural, and don't fool around about it. It's too late after they've already bitten or scratched you." Chapter 8, pg. 96

"A boy, before he really grows up, is pretty much like a wild animal. He can get the wits scared clear out of him today and by tomorrow have forgotten all about it." Chapter 9, pg. 99

"But we were too smart, Old Yeller and I." Chapter 9, pg. 105

"I reached in and let him lick my hand. 'Yeller,' I said, 'I'll be back. I'm promising that I'll be back.'" Chapter 10, pg. 123

"Papa had left me to look after things. But now I was laid up, and here was a girl handling my work about as good as I could. Still, she couldn't get out and mark hogs or kill meat or swing a chopping axe ... " Chapter 13, pg. 150

"It was a good thing for us, Son; but it wasn't good for Old Yeller." Chapter 15, pg. 175

"That was rough,' he said. "That was as rough a thing as I ever heard tell of happening to a boy. And I'm mighty proud to learn how my boy stood up to it. You couldn't ask any more of a grown man.'" Chapter 16, pg. 181.





## Topics for Discussion

1. How do you feel about finding out early in the story that Travis will kill his dog? Does this knowledge diminish the novel's suspense? Does it enhance suspense by making you wonder why Travis will have to kill his beloved pet?
2. Compare the roles of children in modern families to the roles of Travis and Arliss in *Old Yeller*. Does Travis shoulder more responsibility for his family's well-being than do most children today?
3. Define adulthood both as Travis perceives it and as you see it today. Is Travis's definition a valid one? Is he a "man" by the end of the novel?
4. For much of the novel, Travis and Arliss irritate each other. But when Arliss is nearly killed by the bear, Travis learns "that I loved him as much as I did Mama and Papa, maybe in some ways even a little bit more." Why would a person love his sibling more than he would his parents? Are Travis's feelings for his brother realistic?
5. Discuss the Coateses' relationship with nature and compare it to views of nature held by people today. How have issues such as urban growth, pollution, the thinning ozone layer, and the plight of endangered species affected the way Americans perceive nature? Is Travis's view of nature appropriate for today, considering these issues?
6. Travis comments, "A boy, before he really grows up, is pretty much like a wild animal." Do you agree with this statement? Why? Is it equally applicable to girls?
7. At the end of the novel, Travis kills Old Yeller. Is the ending inevitable considering the circumstances leading up to the shooting? Why?



## Essay Topics

Travis tells the reader a tidbit of what is going to happen next, such as "I guess you can see why I nearly died when a man rode up one day and claimed Old Yeller." Chapter 7, pg. 88. How does this way of narrating add or take away from the overall story?

Describe times in the novel when Travis feels he is doing a good job taking care of things while Papa is gone along with times when he feels he is in over his head. Do they seem justified? How does Papa's advice help Travis in taking care of the family?

Give examples of the things Travis and his family must do in the novel in order to survive. In what ways does Old Yeller help out? How do these tasks affect the themes of the novel?

Bud Searcy is a minor character in the story. In what ways does Searcy have a major impact on the behavior of Travis and Old Yeller as well as the overall plot of the book? How is he different from the other men in the story like Papa and Burn Sanderson?

The hydrophobia plague is first described in Chapter 6. Discuss how the hydrophobia plague is present throughout the novel. How does the hydrophobia plague affect the characters and themes?

How does the language of the narrator add to the overall novel? Imagine the story is told in the English of today. How would that affect it?

Many of the characters in this novel are animals. How do the animals interact with each other to increase the meaning of the novel as well as affect the final outcome?

# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Find nonfiction books that describe Texas farming in the late 1860s. Using the information in these books, write a paper that tells whether or not the way of life depicted in *Old Yeller* is accurate.
2. See the Walt Disney movie version of *Old Yeller* and then compare the book to the movie. What major differences exist?
3. Write a paper that analyzes Mama and Lisbeth, the female characters in *Old Yeller*. Are they realistically portrayed? Do they contribute significantly to the plot and theme of the novel?
4. Pick a magazine that you would like to be a book critic for and write a review of *Old Yeller*. Remember that your choice of magazine will affect the information included in the review. For example, a reviewer for a children's magazine will be writing to young people, while a reviewer for *Time* will be writing to adults. These audiences may be interested in different aspects of the novel; however, for either of these magazines, you will not want to give away too much of the plot. A reviewer who is writing for *Family Circle*, on the other hand, will be writing to adults who want to know if they should encourage their children to read the book. For this kind of magazine, you may want to discuss the ending of the novel.
5. Write a narrative of an ordinary event that you and your family participated in, such as sledding, planting the garden, or burning autumn leaves.

Try to make your narrative an example of regionalism by using dialect and giving precise details about the region.

## Further Study

Commire, Anne, ed. *Something about the Author*. Vol. 2. Detroit: Gale Research, 1971. A brief overview of Gipson's life and career.

Cox, Mike. *Fred Gipson: Texas Storyteller*. Austin, TX: Shoal Creek Publishers, 1980. Because the author interviewed Gipson, as well as his first wife, surviving son, and friends, this biography provides personal information previously unavailable.

De Montreville, Doris, and Donna Hill, eds. *Third Book of Junior Authors*. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1972. Includes comments by Gipson about writing.

Henderson, Sam H. *Fred Gipson*. Austin, TX: Steck-Vaughn, 1967. Published before Gipson's death, this book has been largely superseded by the biography by Mike Cox. But its analyses of his novels, including *Old Yeller* and *Savage Sam*, make it worth reading today.

Kirkpatrick, D. L., ed. *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*. New York: St.

Martin's Press, 1983. A good overview of Gipson's literary career.

"Obituary." *New York Times Biographical Edition* (August 1973): 1297-1298.

This obituary includes statements by Gipson about his writing.

Piekarski, Vicki, and John Tuska, eds.

*Encyclopedia of Frontier and Western Fiction*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983.

A good short biography of Gipson.

## Related Titles

Old Yeller ends with Travis deciding to raise one of Old Yeller's pups. That pup is the title character of Gipson's sequel, *Savage Sam*. The time is two years later, and Native Americans who are raiding ranches have captured Travis, Arliss, and Lisbeth. What follows is an often brutal account of the children's ordeal and their eventual rescue. While *Old Yeller* is suitable for any school-aged student, the violence in *Savage Sam* restricts the audience to high school students and adults. This violence includes Arliss biting off and accidentally swallowing a Native American's ear, and the children being forced to eat their beloved mule. Furthermore, in a very brief scene, one of the Native Americans threatens to rape Lisbeth; Travis, in a more detailed scene, is tortured for stopping the man.

The portrait of Native Americans is highly problematic in *Savage Sam*. For the most part, Gipson portrays Native Americans as instruments of brutal violence. They do, however, display such skill in hunting, riding, and staying alive that they earn Travis's grudging respect.

Students should be able to use this novel as a basis for discussing not only the strife, past and present, between Native Americans and whites, but also the problems that occur from other racial and cultural conflicts in America.

Gipson and his collaborator, William Tunberg, wrote screenplays for two Walt Disney adaptations. *Old Yeller*, produced in 1957, was well received by critics and viewers. *Savage Sam*, produced in 1963, was less popular. To make it suitable for audiences of all ages, Disney studios removed most of the violence, making the story into little more than a romp through the Texas countryside.



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