

The Incredible Journey

Recommended for Grades 4-6

Book Summary: The Incredible Journey

1960s. When a family has to move to England for a few months, their beloved pets are sent to stay with a friend who lives deep in the wilderness of Ontario, Canada. There are two dogs, a young Labrador Retriever and an old, bull terrier. There is also a Siamese Cat. They get along well enough at their new house, but one day the man watching them leaves to go on a short trip. He leaves them outside and assumes the housekeeper will let them in when she comes to clean. But, in a series of mix-ups, she ends up believing he took the animals with him on his trip.

The three are led by the young Labrador. He is intent on getting them back to their home, and back to his beloved master. They do not know it, but they have nearly 300 miles of wilderness to cross. Their journey is fraught with danger that includes a bear attack, near drowning in the river, and a terrible encounter with a porcupine.

[SPOILER] The family returns home to be told the terrible news that their pets are missing. They are devastated. A few weeks later, they decide to go to their summer cabin to celebrate their son's birthday. While they are there, their pets arrive and there is a joyful reunion.

Author Biography: Sheila Burnford

Sheila Burnford was born May 11, 1918 in Scotland. She spent her youth living in various parts of the United Kingdom. In 1941, she married Dr. David Burnford. They had three children. During World War II, she worked as an ambulance driver. In 1951, she moved to Ontario, Canada.

In 1961, she published the book "The Incredible Journey". It was only moderately successful. However, when Disney made the book into a film, the book's popularity soared. She also published several books for adults.

Sheila Burnford died of cancer on April 20, 1984 in the village of Bucklers Hard in Hampshire, England.



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Discussion Questions: The Incredible Journey

1. In this story, the animals are able to run away without anyone knowing because of a bad phone connection and a note ending up in the fireplace. Consider things like the advances in technology and the remoteness of the location. Do you think this situation could happen today? Why or why not?
2. Bodger, the old bull terrier, collapses after one day of running and is mauled by a young bear. Tao, the Siamese cat, jumps in to save him from being killed and manages to scare both the bear and his mother away. Do you think a cat could scare away a bear? Why or why not?
3. The animals show their love for each other in different ways. What do each of them do to show their love? How do your pets show you that they love you?
4. Tao is only willing to stay with the young girl and her family when his hearing is impaired. As soon as he can hear again, he leaves. What does this say about the nature of cats? Is it a good or bad thing?
5. Of the three animals, who seems the most likely to survive for an extended time in the wilderness? What makes you think so?
6. Tao the cat isn't afraid of anything in the wild, until he is being stalked by the lynx. Are cats the most dangerous predators in the wild? Why or why not? What animal do you think is the most dangerous in the wild?
7. Luath, the Labrador desperately wants to avoid people. Yet, each animal is saved by a different group of people while on their journey. Bodger has his wounds from the bear treated by a Native American woman. Tao is saved from drowning by a kind family. Luath is saved from starving when the couple removes the porcupine quills from his face. Does this say anything about the relationship between people and animals? What? Why do you think Luath is so wary of people then?
8. The animals end up finding their family at their summer cabin. How did they know to go there and not to the family's other home? Do you think this was fate or a lucky coincidence?
9. Why was Elizabeth so sure the animals were alive? Why was Peter so sure they were dead? Do you think it is better to believe the positive and to be disappointed if it doesn't happen or to believe the negative and be surprised if it does? Why?



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