

Scrap #3: Dog on Trial

Author: Vince Ford

Synopsis

Scrap is growing up to be a fine sheep dog. He looks different from the other dogs at Rocky Ridge Station because he is blond, but he has “the eye” and has shown his owner Johnny that he has what it takes to herd sheep. Scrap was abandoned as a puppy but has met his mother Pat and respects her immensely. He is excited about meeting his dad Rex but when he does he is bitterly disappointed. Rex is arrogant and cruel. He refuses to acknowledge that Scrap is his son and scoffs about Scrap’s sheep herding ability. Scrap becomes determined to train for the dog trials with Johnny and beat his father. Scrap is single-minded in his training and all he thinks about is winning. But will Scrap even make it to the dog trails? What Scrap learns is that he is not in control of everything and sometimes fate can intervene and upset the best laid plans.

Text Type

Dog on Trial is the third novel in award-winning New Zealand author Vince Ford’s new Scrap series. Suitable for young boys and girls, Scrap tells the story of a young dog whose owner tried to drown him at birth because he was different. Luckily he is rescued and now lives with Johnny at Rocky Ridge Station. Despite being blond, Scrap is a talented sheep musterer whose skills are still improving.

While the story is written in third person point of view, the reader is given a unique insight into Scrap’s life on the farm, where animals can talk to each other. The story is fast-paced and humorous and contains short, named chapters. Illustrated with delightful pencil sketches the story will appeal to anyone who likes animals. While the story is light hearted, some serious themes such as identity, prejudice, friendship and the importance of knowing who you are is explored.

Sharing the Novel

The novel has been divided up as follows: Chapter 1 (pp. 5–14), Chapters 2–6 (pp. 15–72) and Chapters 7–12 (pp. 72–134).

During the shared sessions encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and ideas presented in the novel. Have them make inferences and predictions. While the story is told from third person point of view, this is very much Scrap’s story. What is the effect of this? Have students discuss what we find out about life on the farm and any important themes or ideas raised in the text. They should also explore how Scrap develops or changes as the story progresses.

Introducing the Novel

Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- Why is Scrap called a “blond pup”?

- Where does Scrap live?
- What do you think happens when Scrap first meets his dad?
- Why is Scrap determined to enter the dog trials?

Teacher reads Chapter 1 (pp. 5–14) aloud. Students follow along in their books.

Comprehension Chapter 1 (pp. 5–14)

- Who is Rex? What does Pat think of him?
- In what way is Scrap different to other dogs?
- What is Pat really good at?
- Who is Johnny Mac? Who is Lionel?
- Why is Scrap convinced that he needs to go to the dog trials?
- How does Scrap impress Lionel and Johnny Mac?

Discussion

- What do we learn about Scrap and his life on the farm in this chapter?
- What does Scrap's determination to go to the trials reveal about his character?
- How do you think Pat's comments about Rex made Scrap feel?

Students read Chapters 2–6 (pp. 15–72) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 2–6 (pp. 15–72)

- What is the Scrap's first impression of Jess? How is she different to the other dogs? Why does Buster think she has had a hard time of it?
- How does Jess behave towards Buster and Pat? Why do you think she behaves like this?
- How does Jess react to Scrap and Sam when they are playing around her kennel? What does she tell them about her past?
- Why does Buster suggest that Scrap talk to Pat about the dog trials? What information does she give him?
- Why do you think that Pat doesn't think Rex is a father worth looking up to?
- How is herding cows different to herding sheep? Why doesn't the "eye" work on cows?

- Why does Buster think that Johnny is working too hard?
- Describe Scrap's first training session. Which sheep causes Scrap the most trouble? Why is Johnny disappointed?
- Why do you think Scrap doesn't want Jess to do well in the yards? Why does Jess impress Johnny so much? What does she do that gets her into trouble?
- Why does Buster get angry at Jess? Is his anger justified? Why/why not? Who sticks up for her?
- Why does Scrap get excited when he approaches Mount Misery Station?
- Who is Jenny? Why does Johnny become flustered when he talks to her?
- Why does the black dog in the land cruiser laugh at Scrap? Why does he think that Scrap's a loser? What sudden realisation does Scrap come to about the dog?
- How does Scrap feel when Rex refuses to acknowledge that he is his son?
- Why is it important to Scrap that he compete against his father at the dog trials?

Discussion

- What affects has Jess's neglect and abuse had on her? How does Johnny begin to gain her trust?
- Buster is the dogs' team leader? What qualities does he possess that make him a good leader?
- How do Scrap and the other dogs view humans? What are some of the activities that they witness which they find hard to understand?
- Make a prediction about what is going to happen in the story next.

Students read Chapters 7–12 (pp. 72–134) independently before the next shared session.

Comprehension Chapters 7–12 (pp. 72–134)

- Why is it important to de-worm the sheep?
- Why doesn't Scrap get much practice on the dog trial course?
- Why does Scrap want to impress Jess?
- Why does Johnny put an electric collar on Jess? Why don't the other dogs warn her? How effective is the collar?
- Why do Scrap and Jess argue after she catches the stray sheep? What does Jess accuse Scrap of being? Is she right? Justify your answer.

- How do the rams escape? Why does Scrap think that his colour is an advantage in the dark?
- Why does Johnny get so frustrated when he tries to fix the fence?
- How does Scrap react when Johnny brings Jess along with them? Why does he react like this? Why is it so important to Scrap that he beat Jess?
- Why does Jess think that Scrap is self-absorbed? Do you agree with her? Why/why not?
- Why do Scrap and Jess fight?
- How does Johnny get hurt? How does Jess know that he is still alive? How does Johnny's accident change the atmosphere between Jess and Scrap?
- How do Scrap and Jess work together to alert the mailman to Johnny's predicament?
- How does Jess react when Scrap gives her encouragement?
- Why is it so difficult for Jess to get the rams onto the road? How does she eventually achieve her goal?
- How does Scrap react when he learns that the dog trials are the next day? Why is Jess disappointed in him?
- Why doesn't Scrap want to join in and play with the other dogs?
- Where does Lionel take Scrap? Why is Scrap disappointed?
- How does Scrap feel when he realises that Lionel trusts him to herd the sheep by himself?
- What realisation does Scrap come to after he successfully musters the sheep?
- Why is he looking forward to seeing Jess?
- What does Johnny thank Jess for? What news does he give her?
- Who won the dog trials? Why does Scrap decide that this doesn't matter?
- Why does Jess think that she needs to keep Scrap in line?

Discussion

- What does Scrap teach us about life on a farm?
- Are electric collars a good way to train a dog? Why/why not?
- Jess's comments to Scrap make him reflect on himself and his actions. Is he too worried about proving himself? How does his character change at the end of the story?
- What lessons does Scrap learn about himself and how to treat others?

Activities

Writing – Write a synopsis of what you think should happen in the next *Scrap* book.

Static Image – Design a poster advertising *Scrap* that would be suitable for display in your school library.

Writing – Choose an important theme or main idea from the story and explain how this is developed by the author.

Writing – Write a letter to the author explaining what you like about the story.

Storyboard – Choose 10 important events from the story and create a storyboard. Under each illustration briefly explain what is happening.

Issues – Create a poster against cruelty to animals.

Character – Draw a large diagram of Scrap on a piece of cartridge paper. On one side, write down all of his positive characteristics. On the other side write down his negative characteristics. For each adjective or idea you come up with find an example from the story that illustrates this quality.

Character – Make up 5 interview questions (with answers) for Scrap.

Theme – Design a collage that depicts the main theme of the novel. Use different words and images from the story to convey your chosen theme.

Character – Write a paragraph about Scrap. Describe what he is like at the start of the story and how he develops and changes as the story progresses. Explain the reasons why these changes occur and what lessons you think Scrap has learned by the end of the story.

Character – Describe Scrap's actions and behaviour in a particular situation that occurs in the story. Justify or criticise his motives in this situation.

Notes written by Vicki Ladd