



## **Bull Rider**

Marilyn Halvorson

Reading level: 3.0

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AR Quiz # 67480

### **Book Summary**

When Layne was ten years old, his father was killed riding a bull just seconds before he completed his last ride to win the National Finals Championship. It seems like winning the championship for his father is one way Layne could get back what was taken from him, but his mother has different ideas. Her refusal to allow Layne to ride bulls forces him to practice behind her back and enter his first rodeo.

### **Prereading Idea**

Browse the Internet for sites applicable to bull riding, searching for keywords such as “terminology” or “history.”

Show students the website or print a list of terminology.

Then ask students to choose five words from the list and write a paragraph explaining an aspect of bull riding using the words they have chosen. Students can then read their paragraphs to the class.

**Connecting to the World—Writing and Research Ideas**

- Tara wanted to barrel race; Layne's heart's desire was to be a bull rider; Jana's father supplied broncs and bulls to the rodeo; and at one time, Chase was the best bull rider around. Ask students to choose an aspect of rodeo to research: a rodeo event, rodeo clowns, cowboys, western clothing, animals or others. Have students assimilate their information and prepare a three to five minute oral presentation using a visual aid(s). Add an introduction, transitions and organization, as needed, to tape a documentary on rodeo to share with other classes.
- Layne says that when his dad died, his whole world fell apart; a big hollow space existed inside of him that nothing would ever fill up. Write a letter to Layne from his father or from Layne to his father concerning the desire to ride bulls and the balance between the cost and the thrill of bull riding. Be sure to include the perspective of the writer on the current situation. Ask students to volunteer to read their letters to the class.

**Connecting to the Text—Elements of the Novel*****Theme***

The strength of the relationships in Layne's family proves to be beneficial to Layne. In groups of three, ask students to brainstorm a list of words that describe the McQueen family. Beside each word, write the incident that occurred to exemplify that word. For example, when Terror was willing to risk her life to save Layne from Rhino, she showed love because she put herself in danger to save her brother. When the groups have compiled their lists, have them write a thematic statement and a visual depiction about family relationships. Include the thematic statements and visual depiction on a class display titled, "Home Sweet Home."

***Conflict***

All of the major characters in *Bull Rider* face conflict, but the reader sees and feels Layne's conflict. In partners, ask students to brainstorm a list of conflicts faced by the characters and separate them into two columns, internal and external. How do the characters resolve them? Are the resolutions what you expected? How would you have handled the situation? Have students role play the conflicts investigating the actual and alternative resolutions to the conflicts.

***Setting***

The setting in *Bull Rider* makes a strong contribution to the story's overall impact on the reader. Ask students to glance back through the novel and find passages, words and phrases that help create the setting. Ask students to select one passage and draw a picture of the place described by the author. Place the drawings on a classroom mural and add written responses to the story alongside the drawings.

### *Characters*

A character can be classified as static, one who does not change much, or dynamic, one who changes as a result of the story's events. List the major characters in *Bull Rider* and ask students to identify them as either static or dynamic. Students need to compare the character in the beginning of the story to the same character at the end of the story and ask themselves, "Has the character changed, and if so, how did they change?" Divide students into groups and assign each group a character to chart. Have students visually portray this character as dynamic or static on a line graph or flow chart, including events from the story.

### **Connecting to Students—Discussion Questions**

1. Chase remembers what it was like to be a kid, and he says, "You want to do something so bad, but nobody thinks you are old enough to handle it." Ask students to share a time when others felt they were "too young" to accomplish something. Did they have someone who believed in them and allowed them to do what they wanted to do? Did they prove to themselves they were capable of handling the situation?
2. Layne knows that riding bulls might cost him his relationship with his mother, but he is determined to ride. Why does his mother finally give in? What other choices did she have? What would the consequences have been had she made a different choice? Have you ever made a decision that could cost you a valuable relationship? Did it turn out as well as Layne's decision?
3. For his sister Terror, Layne willingly sacrifices his first ride at the rodeo—with a surprising result. Why was Layne willing to miss his first ride for her? What does this tell you about his character? Do you think you would have made the same choice? Why or why not?
4. The secret Layne was keeping from his mother forced several people to lie for him. Jana, Chase and Terror all willingly deceived others they loved to help Layne achieve his dream. Do you think this was right or wrong? Do you think Layne realized the position in which he put his sister and friends by asking them to cover for him? Why or why not?
5. Jana and Layne's relationship begins to change the closer Layne gets to bull riding in the rodeo. Why do you think their relationship moves from "just friends" to something more intimate? Do you think it is possible for friends to become girlfriend and boyfriend? Why or why not?
6. After Rhino almost killed Layne, Layne wanted to ride him to prove he could, but the thought of it almost made him sick with fear. His desire to overcome that fear motivated him to face his ride on Rhino with courage and determination. How has fear motivated you to achieve a goal?

## Writer's Craft

### *Figurative Language*

- A simile is a tool writers use to help readers understand a concept by comparing it to another generally unrelated concept. Students should reread the following paragraphs, paying close attention to the similes.

*...jumping around like he had a hide full of hornets.*  
*...jerked around like a lassoed calf.*  
*...like an eagle's claw would grab a rabbit.*  
*...tippy-toeing around the barnyard like a ballet dancer.*  
*...paced around like a caged tiger.*

Did the author accomplish what she intended? Ask students to write a simile about an aspect of rodeo on sentence strips and post them around the room.

- When the author uses images that help the reader experience the story with his or her senses, writing comes alive for the reader. Show students the following examples, and then have them find some of their own.

*...the slippery loose hide over a body full of rippling muscle.*  
*...that bull would have made hamburger out of you.*  
*...he threw me an impatient glance over his shoulder.*  
*...he reared up and pawed the air a couple of times.*  
*...land with a jackhammer jerk and twist.*

Do these images and the ones the students found paint them a picture? Have students write a description of the bull Rhino or Terror's horse Rambo using sensory images. Ask students to share their descriptions with the class.

### Author Biography

**Marilyn Halvorson** is not only a writer, but she is a fine horsewoman, raising several horses and more than fifty Simmental/Hereford cows. When she is not on the ranch, Marilyn tours schools and talks to students about her books.