



## ***Tough Trails***

Irene Morck

Reading level: 2.6

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AR Quiz # 72903

### **Book Summary**

Seventeen-year-old Ambrose must sell his beloved horse Blackie for dog meat at the horse auction after Blackie tears the tendon in his leg. Ambrose's sorrow over the loss of Blackie causes him to make what seems like a bad decision; he buys a twenty-five-year-old mare to use as a pack horse in his uncle's trail-riding business. But when the horse saves the life of a young boy during a hailstorm, Ambrose and his uncle realize his decision was a good one.

### **Prereading Idea**

*Tough Trails* opens with the main character, Ambrose, at a horse auction selling his injured horse. Ask students to go to these websites that offer information about selling horses for meat:

[http://p3\\_acres.tripod.com/id218.htm](http://p3_acres.tripod.com/id218.htm)

<http://lists.envirolink.org/pipermail/ar-news/Week-of-Mon-20031124/011367.html>

Ask students to further research the controversy and debate both sides of the issue.

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

- Ambrose's aunt and uncle own a trail-riding business, taking customers on trail rides through the Canadian Rockies. Ask students to use the Internet to plan a trail ride anywhere in the world for at least four people. This site will be helpful:

[www.horserentals.com/trailrides.html](http://www.horserentals.com/trailrides.html)

Then, using the information they have gathered, have them write and illustrate a brochure, including: the cost of the trail ride, food and lodging; sites and experiences riders can expect to see or experience on the trail; and travel information from their city to the trail location. Display the brochures on the wall.

- Mr. Friesen's purpose in taking the trail ride to Lake Wapta was to photograph rare wildflowers and study the flora and fauna of the area. Wildflowers found in this region of Canada include moss campion, glacier lily, purple saxifrage, white mountain heather, and alpine forget-me-not. Ask students to choose two of these or find other wildflowers that grow in this region, and on a plain sheet of white paper, print or draw a picture of the flower labeling both the scientific and popular name. Make a book including all the pages and keep it on display in the library.

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

The title, *Tough Trails*, could have both literal and figurative meanings. Ask students to use a thesaurus to look up both words, making a list of synonyms for each word. Then, using some of the words on the list, have students construct a thematic statement and write a well-developed paragraph justifying their statement with examples from the book.

***Character***

Ambrose's concern for what others think of him surfaces on the first page when he states, "I've always had to act tougher than I've felt." And again in chapter 1, "Cowboys are supposed to be tough." Several times Janice refers to him as a "bleeding heart." Ask students to identify the meaning of the term "bleeding heart" and explain why Ambrose did not view it as a negative trait. Then ask students to draw a twisted heart, labeling one side "tough" and the other side "bleeding heart." Then, with a partner, have students find examples in the book where Ambrose shows himself to be one or the other, and write the examples on the appropriate side of the heart.

***Conflict***

Janice and Ambrose did not especially like each other and jealousy played a role in their relationship. Have students work with a partner to tell both Janice's and Ambrose's sides of the story in a reader's theater script to present to the class. Students should write in first person, one partner assuming the role of Ambrose, and one the role of Janice. Students should also include why each had a reason to be jealous and how they overcame their differences to become friends. Ask students to present their scripts to the class.

**Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. What motivates Ambrose to buy Society Girl? Why is he mad at himself after he buys her?
2. Ambrose did not particularly like Janice, and he is afraid of what she will say about Society Girl. Why do his feelings for her change? Do her feelings toward Ambrose change also?
3. What do you think Mr. Friesen means when he says, "...it's better that Ryan cries now than we cry later," (ch. 4).
4. Talking about her mom and Society Girl, Janice says, "It's not right to abuse anything or anybody just because they have the spirit to keep going," (ch. 8). Why does she compare the two? Is the comparison valid?
5. Ryan is obnoxious and a pain in everyone's neck. Why does he act the way he does? How does being scared in the storm alter his behavior?
6. Why is it important to Ambrose to tell Mrs. Longhurst about Society Girl?

**Writer's Craft*****Imagery***

The author uses imagery to paint pictures with words so that readers can "see" the scene. For example, in chapter 5, she describes riding through mountain forests, and in chapter 10, she describes the forest after the hailstorm. Ask students to think of a place they have been and write a paragraph using imagery, including at least three of the five senses. Have students read their paragraphs to the class. Ask the other students to close their eyes and try to imagine or recreate each place in their mind, including the sensory associations as each student reads. Have students choose their favorite image and draw that image. Display drawings with the original images that inspired them.

### **Author Biography**

**Irene Morck** was born in St. John, New Brunswick, and grew up on the Canadian prairies. She spent two years in Barbados and ten years in Jamaica, teaching chemistry at a boy's school and conducting biochemistry research at the University of the West Indies. Irene also substitute teaches and enjoys freelance photography—she has sold photos for travel posters, magazines and calendars. She lives with her husband Mogens Nielsen on their farm near Spruce View, Alberta, where they raise hay and grain and spend as much time as they can in the summer trail-riding in the mountains. They also enjoy such hobbies as canoeing, cross-country skiing, learning Spanish, and riding and driving their mules and horses.