



## ***On the Trail of the Bushman***

Anita Daher

Interest level: ages 8–11

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128 pages

**Consider the following statement as you read *On the Trail of the Bushman*:**

A lie is not in the words, or lack of words, but in the intention of the deceiver.

### **Story**

Junior Canadian Ranger Tommy Toner has a secret. During the annual JCR summer camp in Whitehorse, Yukon, he plays a prank, which has unexpected and destructive results. Ashamed, and afraid of what people will think, he keeps quiet, even though the guilt eats away at him. Tommy's friends know something is wrong, but they have no idea that Tommy's secret will bring them face-to-face with something dark, dangerous and terrifying.

### **Author**

**Anita Daher** draws writing inspiration from the many places she's been fortunate to spend time. Some of her favorite childhood memories involve roaming over the rocks by Hudson Bay and fishing on the tundra in the Northwest Territories. *On the Trail of the Bushman* is the third book in her Junior Canadian Rangers series, after *Racing for Diamonds* and *Poachers in the Pingos*. When she's not writing, Anita teaches writing workshops and edits teen books for a Winnipeg publishing house. She also likes to spend time baking, playing her guitar (badly) and turning her backyard garden into a haven for neighborhood bunnies.

### **Author Website**

[www.anitadaher.com](http://www.anitadaher.com)

**Connecting to the Curriculum***Language Arts*

- Have students write a short story about someone who decides to live as a hermit. Questions to consider: How would having no one to talk to change you? What struggles and challenges would you face?
- Ask students to write a poem about being frightened. Encourage them to use their five senses in describing their feelings.
- Have students imagine themselves as Tommy, who has never seen, heard, or smelled a horse in real life. After a day of riding, what would he write in his journal about it?
- Share some short newspaper articles with the class. Discuss the *inverted pyramid* format that newspaper articles follow, where the five Ws lead the story and the smaller details come toward the end. Have students write a series of interview questions for the real-life Sam McGee and then write a news story about him.
- Pick a scene from the story and rewrite it in comic-book format, complete with illustrations.
- Have students go through the story and choose an example of a situation that provokes strong emotions such as anger, fear or admiration. Ask them to write a journal entry about why the passage made them feel that way. Invite students to share their responses.

*Social Studies*

- Have students discuss how different cultures have similar stories about the bushman. How can this be?
- There are 14 First Nations groups in the Yukon. Divide your class into small groups to complete a short research project on one of the following:
  - ◆ Carcross Tagish First Nation
  - ◆ Champagne and Aishihik First Nations
  - ◆ Kluane First Nation
  - ◆ Kwanlin Dün First Nation
  - ◆ Liard First Nation
  - ◆ Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation
  - ◆ Na-Cho Nyak Dün First Nation
  - ◆ Ross River Dena Council
  - ◆ Selkirk First Nation
  - ◆ Ta'an Kwach'an Council
  - ◆ Teslin Tlingit Council
  - ◆ Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation
  - ◆ Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
  - ◆ White River First Nation

Research projects should include details about the given group's geographic location, history and traditions, language, beliefs and cultural changes in recent years.

*Art*

- Have students create a clay model of a bushman, using brushes and other fine tools to craft the look of hair. Fire, paint and glaze the models.
- With mixed media, have students create a diorama of the inside of a cave that has become a home.
- Have students paint T-shirts with words and images they feel describe some of the values of the Junior Canadian Rangers.
- Invite students to create a poster about the book that will encourage others to read it. Be sure the poster is eye-catching, aesthetically appealing and uses persuasive language.

**Science**

- As a class, learn how mirrored surfaces can cause fires. Discuss what sorts of conditions need to be in place in order for a mirror fire to start? Be sure to cover not only light but forest conditions. What were the probable conditions that helped the fire at the JCR camp get a foothold?
- Study forest fires by examining some of the most recent ones in California, Australia or western Canada. Divide students into small groups and assign them to research a component of forest fires. Cover: 1) causes and ideal conditions in which a fire often ignites; 2) how to avoid these conditions; 3) fire's behavior (especially with regard to wind); 4) fire's benefits to the forest; and 5) how fires are extinguished.

**Drama**

- As a class, get to know a little bit about Yukon history. Invite students to choose a moment in Yukon history and write a skit about it. Allow students time to rehearse and prepare before presenting their skits to the class.
- Have students create short skits based on stories the JCRs tell around the campfire in *On the Trail of the Bushman*.
- Play charades! Have students reenact scenes from the book without using dialogue, while others try to guess which scenes they are. This can be done as a class, or in smaller groups.
- Organize a choral reading of *The Shooting of Dan McGrew* or *The Cremation of Sam McGee*.

**Math**

- Gather flyers from home renovation stores. Have students brainstorm all the needs and costs associated with rebuilding a kitchen/cookhouse building for a large residential camp. Break students into groups and have them plan, design and budget for a new building. Invite each group to share their drawings and budgets with the class.
- Solve the following problems with your class:
  1. It takes 30 JCRs to form a bucket brigade lined up from a burning camp building to the river. There are 185 JCRs in the camp. If the fire spreads to other buildings, how many additional lines can they make?
  2. Tommy had \$20 to spend in Whitehorse. His \$6 entrance fee to get into the museum was paid for by the JCRs, but he bought a T-shirt at the gift shop for \$11.50. Later he bought a burrito and a carton of milk from a lunch truck for \$6. For dessert he bought a tiger-tiger ice-cream cone for \$2.50. How much change did he take back to camp?

Invite students to create their own word problems and switch with a partner to solve them.

**Physical Education**

- Try a traditional Inuit game: The Legwrestle (as seen on YouTube)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=igUfFemrem8&feature=Playlist&p=AD0F494118F998CA&playnext\\_from=PL&playnext=1&index=13](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igUfFemrem8&feature=Playlist&p=AD0F494118F998CA&playnext_from=PL&playnext=1&index=13)
  - ◆ Two people lie side-by-side on floor, head to feet, feet to head.
  - ◆ Lock elbows
  - ◆ Count to three and raise inside legs. Each will lock with the other's leg at the knee.
  - ◆ Keep legs extended, and push. The person who raises the other off of his or her back wins.

**Connecting to the Text**

- Provide students with a graphic organizer that will guide them in comparing and contrasting two characters in the book. (Alternatively, you and the class could create this kind of graphic organizer together.) Have students share their results with the class.
- Have students go through *On the Trail of the Bushman* and select twenty or so new or unfamiliar vocabulary words. Challenge students to create a crossword puzzle using these words. Students must write clues as well as design the puzzle board. (If creating a crossword is too sophisticated for your group, have students create a word search.)
- A simile is a comparison using the words *like* or *as*. Similes are often an effective way to show action or mood in a story. Ask students to consider the following simile about how Tommy's body hurts as he runs for his freedom after escaping Albert's cave: "His head felt like it would crack like an eggshell, it hurt so bad." How does the simile make Albert's discomfort even stronger? Have students find five more examples of similes in the story.
- Discuss *setting* with your students. Ask them to think about the places where events occur in the story. Have them draw a map of the area and indicate where and when the important events take place. Maps should be labeled with a title, scale and legend.
- Like plot, setting and characters, theme is also an important literary element in any novel. *Theme* is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It's not really a moral, but it's kind of a guiding message all the same. Break your class into small groups and have them discuss what they understand to be the theme of *On the Trail of the Bushman*.
- Engage students in a discussion of heroism. Heroism can entail many different kinds of character actions. For some, great acts of heroism might be touching a lizard, telling the truth or sticking up for what you believe in. It doesn't always have to mean rescuing people from burning buildings! Have students discuss what heroism means to them. Invite them to select the most heroic character in the book and write a letter to him or her explaining why they think s/he is a hero.

**Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions**

1. In chapter 11, Albert says: “I didn’t plan on staying away, but the more time passes, the harder it is to unknot a lie.” He also says, “The thing about a lie is it can get so big that you can’t get back around it.” Do you agree with his statements? Explain, using examples from your own life.
2. Tommy and his friends don’t like to discuss the windigo. They’re pretty superstitious about it. Can you think of any superstitions that you share with your friends? Do you talk about them openly? Why or why not? Why do you think superstitions come to be, and why do some people choose to avoid discussing them?
3. When Tommy confesses to being responsible for the fire back at camp, he explains to Albert that he initially concealed it because he was ashamed and afraid that people would dislike him. There are many reasons why people lie. Make a list and discuss whether some lies are worse than others.
4. Think of a time you lied. Have you ever been relieved to own up to a lie? What happened when you confessed? Were things as bad as you had feared?
5. Write one example of a time you told the truth when it would have been easier to lie.

**Author’s Note**

Dear Readers,

When I wrote the second book in this series, *Poachers in the Pingos*, I was pleased to meet Tommy Toner, a boy who smiled all the time, just because. He reminded me of my long-ago best friend Sally, who was born and raised in the small Inuit hamlet of Baker Lake, the community my family moved to when I was twelve. When a winter’s day was too cold and blizzardy to go outside, we would sit on my living-room floor making paper cutouts of horses so that we could play “ranch.” Except Sally had never seen a real-life horse and didn’t know what it was like to ride one. Sally and I shared each other’s worlds and cultures that year, but I could never quite make her understand what it was like to ride a horse. These many years later, through Tommy’s experience at JCR camp in *On the Trail of the Bushman*, I got to imagine what it might have been like for her.

Onward!  
Anita

## Resources

### Books

#### *Fiction*

- Babbitt, Natalie. *Tuck Everlasting*  
Daher, Anita. *Poachers in the Pingos; Racing for Diamonds*  
L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*  
Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *Shiloh*  
Sachar, Louis. *Holes*

#### *Nonfiction*

- Allen, Judy. *Unexplained: An Encyclopedia of Curious Phenomena, Strange Superstitions, and Ancient Mysteries*  
Hughes, Mary. *Popular Superstitions*  
Llewellyn, Claire. *Kids Survival Handbook*  
Moser, Adolph and David Melton. *Don't Tell a Whopper on Fridays! The Children's Truth Control Book*  
Wiseman, John. *The SAS Survival Guide*

### Online

Canadian Rangers

[www.army.forces.gc.ca/Land\\_Force/English/7\\_5\\_1.asp](http://www.army.forces.gc.ca/Land_Force/English/7_5_1.asp)

The Junior Canadian Ranger Program

[www.rangers.dnd.ca/index-eng.asp](http://www.rangers.dnd.ca/index-eng.asp)

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Steller's Jay

[www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Stellers\\_Jay/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Stellers_Jay/id)

Yukon History from the Government of Yukon

[www.gov.yk.ca/aboutyukon/history.html](http://www.gov.yk.ca/aboutyukon/history.html)

Yukon First Nations from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

[www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/scr/yt/lks/fn-eng.asp](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/scr/yt/lks/fn-eng.asp)

Compendium of Common Superstitions

[www.csicop.org/superstition/library/common\\_superstitions](http://www.csicop.org/superstition/library/common_superstitions)

Clay Sculpture for Children (Animal Themes & Details)

[www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/elem/Cindy-animals.htm](http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/elem/Cindy-animals.htm)