



Poachers in the Pingos

Anita Daher

Interest level: ages 8–11

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AR Quiz # 126479

Consider the following question as you read *Poachers in the Pingos*:

How important are first impressions, and how often are they misleading?

Story

When Junior Canadian Rangers Colly and Jaz visit Colly's uncle on Canada's Arctic coast, they are quick to discover something is amiss: Someone has been hunting and killing gyrfalcons. During a staged emergency, Colly and Jaz put two and five together, and end up in a terrifying race for their lives!

Author

Anita Daher draws writing inspiration from the many places she's been fortunate to spend time, including Summerside, PEI; Yellowknife, NT; Churchill, MB; Baker Lake, NU; and Sault Ste. Marie, ON. Many of her favorite childhood memories involve roaming over the rocks by Hudson Bay and fishing on the tundra in the Northwest Territories. *Poachers in the Pingos* is the second book in her Junior Canadian Rangers series. The first is *Racing for Diamonds*, which is set along the historic Canol Trail, and the third is *On the Trail of the Bushman*, which is set in the Yukon close to Whitehorse. When she's not writing, Anita 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

Connecting to the Curriculum

Language Arts

- Pingo is an unusual word, specific to a unique geographic feature in the north. As students read, have them create a list of other unusual words from this story. Challenge students to use each of these words in a sentence.
- Colly's JCR group has warm bannock, dried whitefish and muktuk (dried beluga whale skin and blubber) for lunch. Have students write a poem about the food items they would take on an unusual picnic.
- As a class, brainstorm a list of superstitions. Break students into groups and assign each group several superstitions. Using the library and the Internet, ask students to find out where their assigned superstitions came from. Ask students to keep track of their references and to jot down the story behind each superstition, if they can dig it up. (For example, according to a 1903 *New York Times* article, the superstition that it is unlucky to spill salt probably goes back to ancient times when salt was sprinkled on the head of someone who was about to be sacrificed. Yikes!) Invite each group to share their findings with the class.
- Colly is sensitive about his blue eyes, which are unusual for a Dene boy. Assign students to write a story about a character who is different from everyone else. How is that individual different? Does he or she wish to be the same as others, or does he/she feel as Harvey Chiapot does: "Who wants to be the same as everyone else? That would be pretty boring." Have students work with their peers to revise and edit their manuscripts.
- Have students pick a scene from the story and rewrite it in comic-book format.
- Tuktoyaktuk means "looks like a caribou" in the Inuvialuit language. Legend has it that, once upon a time, several caribou waded into the water, froze, and that they can still be seen during low tide as caribou shaped reefs which line the shore. There are many interesting place names in Canada. Have students look at a map and choose one, then create a story about how the name came to be.
- Legends are an important part of First Nations culture, especially prior to European contact. Discuss with students the value of legends. Are there any legends that are important to their own ethnic backgrounds? What is the purpose of legends? Can they think of other cultures that relied on legends as a way of passing along wisdom or explaining natural phenomena? Locate several legends online or at the library and share these with your class.

Social Studies

- Initiate a discussion about cultural values and the importance of the older generation. In chapter 1, Colly has to remind himself to respect his elders. This is a cultural value for the Dene people. Is it a value in your culture too? How do you know? Why is having respect for your elders a good thing?

- Talk about pingos: what they are made of, how they are formed, how they are damaged and destroyed, and why it is important to protect them.
- The poaching ring in *Poachers in the Pingos* was inspired by a worldwide police operation in the 1980s called “Operation Falcon.” One of the criminals involved in Operation Falcon was Canadian falconer and falcon breeder John Slaytor. The author gave the same last name—quite deliberately—to Philip. Investigate and discuss the real-life global problem of illegal falcon smuggling.
- Discuss the need to have search-and-rescue guidelines, especially in a country as vast as Canada. Have students simulate leaving a forty-foot-by-ten-foot emergency message for an over-flying aircraft like the one Colly and his friends leave in *Poachers in the Pingos*. Alternatively, create a real message somewhere on school property, but instead of an emergency signal use a JCR value word such as *honor*, *respect* or *truth*.
- Have students draw a relief map of the circumpolar world. Include water features, mountain ranges and, of course, a few pingos. Maps should have a title, scale and a key.

Science

- Have students do a mini-research project on one of the animals mentioned in *Poachers in the Pingos*: gyrfalcon, raven, caribou or musk ox.
- Research how pingos form. Have students draw the formation of a pingo in stages. Then have students draw a cross-section of a pingo.
- Discuss how global warming is being seen and felt right now in the Arctic.
- Talk about why people are beginning to search for alternative energy sources. Divide students into small groups and have them research alternative forms of energy, such as wind farms, geothermal power, nuclear power, solar power, biomass fuel and wave power. Have each group create a poster, PowerPoint presentation or other method of sharing their findings with the class.

Art

- Create a model of a pingo. Begin with a large Styrofoam ball cut in half. Add paint, clay or other materials to simulate dirt and plant life on top. If it is an older pingo and is caving in the middle like a volcano, show that too. Can some students create a community freezer within their pingo?
- With mixed media have students create a picture of a raven with blue eyes.
- Have students paint T-shirts with words and images they feel describe some of the values of the Junior Canadian Rangers.

Drama

- Have students create short skits based on *Poachers in the Pingos*. Share these with the class, and perhaps with other grades.
- Scene charades: Have students reenact scenes from the book, while others try to guess which they are. This can be done as a class, or in smaller groups.
- Break into groups and plan a “fake emergency.” Give each group a different job to do. Give the fake emergency a code name. If you enact the emergency, make sure you warn others in the school first!
- Have students perform improv with one person calling out cues: “You are hiking on the tundra when suddenly you see...” What?

Health

- Engage the class in a critical discussion about how people sometimes judge other people by the way they look and talk. Has this ever happened in their school, or in teams or clubs they belong to? How are these kinds of judgments harmful? Can they ever be helpful?
- Are first impressions right or wrong? Do they matter? If yes, why?

Connecting to the Text

- A *simile* is a comparison using the word *like* or *as*. Authors will sometimes use a simile to increase the level of detail or emotion within a passage. Here’s an example from *Poachers in the Pingos*: “The harder he listened the more he could only hear the wind whipping his jacket and beating the insides of his ear canals like some extra-enthusiastic drum band in a parade.” How does this simile add details to the description of the wind out on the tundra? Have students find several more similes in the book. Discuss these similes. Are they effective at magnifying emotion or detail? Why? Ask students to create a few similes of their own that center on the story.
- Have students conduct a literary interview. First, discuss the importance of forming good questions when interviewing a subject. Then, listen to a podcast of a popular show that features interviews of authors, performers and public figures. CBC and NPR are great places to look for these. Pair students up. Have one student study up on the persona of one of the characters in *Poachers in the Pingos*—enough to actually “become” that character for the interview. The other student prepares thoughtful questions that will draw that character out and show the audience insights into the character’s personality and life. Then, have the students conduct (and possibly record) the interview. Share with the rest of the class.
- Discuss with students the importance of *setting* to this story. Have them go back through the novel and find ten or more details that tell the reader about the place where the story is set. How do these details contribute to creating a picture

in the reader's mind? Invite students to draw or create a diorama of their own interpretation of the setting in *Poachers in the Pingos*.

- Make an overhead of the following list. Discuss with students some of the things that make a good story:
 - ◆ a plot that is exciting, suspenseful, baffling or extraordinary
 - ◆ interesting situations that are well explained and believable
 - ◆ characters you care enough about to make you want to keep reading
 - ◆ characters you can relate to and who change and grow as they make decisions to solve problems
 - ◆ descriptions that make you feel like you're there
 - ◆ a variety of settings
 - ◆ a fast start—action, danger, humor
 - ◆ situations that provide an emotional response and give you something to think about
 - ◆ a good ending with problems solved and characters getting what they deserve

Using these criteria, model how to write a critical review of a story that all the students are familiar with (*Little Red Riding Hood* is a good one). Then have students write a critical review of *Poachers in the Pingos*. Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment. Share these reviews with the class, or post them on a bulletin board for the school community to read.

- Conflict is what keeps a story moving along. It's what makes things interesting! Typically, story plot follows one of these four basic patterns of conflict:
 - ◆ *Person against nature*. Tension comes from the character's battle against strong forces of nature.
 - ◆ *Person against person*. Tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.
 - ◆ *Person against society*. Tension comes from the main character's struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
 - ◆ *Person against self*. Tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.

Guide students in a discussion of conflict patterns in *Poachers in the Pingos*. Are there more than one, depending on which part of the story you look at? Which one predominates?

- Colly struggles with a problem throughout *Poachers in the Pingos*. Have students identify the problem and discuss how Colly manages to overcome this fear by the end of the book.

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. There's a superstition in Colly's family that says boys with blue eyes die young, and in terrible accidents. How does believing in this superstition limit Colly's ability to enjoy life? Can you think of any other superstitions that might stop people from living life fully (and fearlessly)?
2. At first, Colly's intuition told him he didn't trust Harvey Chiapot. But later in the story, that changed. Why did Colly change his mind? Have you ever had your intuition lead you astray? Has your intuition ever helped you? Explain.
3. In chapter 13, Colly uses the windsurfer to go for help. He doesn't want to go: he's afraid of what might happen to him if he goes out without a lifejacket. But then he realizes: *Sometimes you just had to make yourself do things, even if you were afraid.* Can you think of some examples from your own life where you've had to force yourself through fear to do something important? What happens when we let fear of the unknown hold us back? When is it important to pay attention to fear?
4. When Colly is afraid, Harvey tells him, "Never mind what might happen, you can only deal with what is happening, right here, right now." What does he mean by it? How can you use this wisdom in your own life?
5. Think about the three young characters in this book: Tommy, Jaz and Colly. Make a list of each character's personality traits. Which character do you feel you share the most in common with? Which character are you most different from? Explain your reasoning.

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

When I contemplated a next adventure for Jaz and Colly, I had a few things to consider. One was: *Where will they go next?* The other was: *Whose story should this be?*

In *Racing for Diamonds* we learned that Colly was touchy about his blue eyes, which are unusual for a Dene boy. The idea of a Dene boy with blue eyes came from two places. One was an old journal entry found in an online museum site. At least I think I found it—I have been unable to find it again. Perhaps I only dreamed it. Anyway, the other was from a Dene man I worked with at CBC Radio in Yellowknife, who once dated a Dene girl with blue eyes. In any case, it made sense to me that Colly might have been bullied about his eyes when he was younger, but I wanted to understand a little more about how else his blue eyes might have affected him. That is why I decided he should take the lead in this story.

Having Jaz stand back a little ended up being much more difficult than I could have imagined! She is so bold and full of life; she does not fade very well into the background. *That* is why I stuck her on the barge.

It has been very fun to explore Tuktoyaktuk with Colly, Jaz and Tommy in this story and to learn a little more about what makes each of them tick. In the next adventure, Colly and Jaz will be back, but Tommy will take the lead as they attend the annual JCR summer camp in Whitehorse.

Onward!

Anita

P.S. Teachers: I would love to see photos of your students' *Poachers in the Pingos*-inspired artwork and/or activities. Email them to me (and let me know if I can post them on my website) at anita.daher@shaw.ca. Visit my website at www.anitadaher.com.

Resources

Books

Fiction

- Daher, Anita. *On the Trail of the Bushman; Racing for Diamonds*
George, Jean Craighead. *Frightful's Mountain; Julie of the Wolves; Julie's Wolf Pack; My Side of the Mountain*
Paulsen, Gary. *Brian's Winter; Hatchet; The River*

Nonfiction

- Greenwood, Barbara. *The Kids Book of Canada* (917.1)
Hancock, Lyn. *Nunavut: Revised* (917.192)
Llewellyn, Claire. *Kids Survival Handbook* (796.4)
Love, Ann and Jane Drake. *The Kids Book of the Far North*
(909.0913)
Whitefeather, Willy. *Willy Whitefeather's Outdoor Survival Handbook for Kids*
Wiseman, John. *The SAS Survival Guide* (613.69)

Online

Operation Falcon

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_FALCON

Canadian Rangers

www.army.forces.gc.ca/land-terre/cr-rc/index-eng.asp

The Junior Canadian Rangers

www.rangers.dnd.ca/index-eng.asp

JCR Red Whistle Programme

www.rangers.dnd.ca/tra-ins/st-ss/rwp-psr-eng.asp

Tuktoyaktuk

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuktoyaktuk>

Pingos

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