

Jim Ugly

by

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Book Information

Sid Fleischman, Jim Ugly

Quiz Number: 6321

William Morrow & Company Inc, 1992

ISBN 0-688-10886-5; LCCN

130 Pages

Book Level: 4.3

Interest Level: MG

This story tells of the adventures of twelve-year-old Jake Bannock and Jim Ugly, his father's part-mongrel, part-wolf dog, as they travel through the Old West trying to find out what really happened to Jake's actor father.

Topics: Adventure, Travel; Animals, Dogs; Mysteries, Missing Persons; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5

Main Characters

Aurora Jake's married cousin on whose Nevada chicken farm Sam Bannock sought refuge from his pursuers

Axie Aurora's gambling-man husband, who raised chickens, and claimed to have buried Sam Bannock

C. W. Cornelius a theater manager and producer who claimed Sam stole his diamonds

D. D. Skeats a.k.a. the yellowleg; a retired cavalry sergeant with wide yellow stripes running down the side of his pants, who was pursuing Sam Bannock

Dr. Fossum the physician who removed the lead ball from Sam's shoulder

Jake Bannock a twelve-year-old-boy, who searches for his father with the help of his dog

Jim Ugly a big mongrel dog, part elkhound and wolf that belonged to Sam Bannock and that was willed to his son, Jake; a.k.a. Amigo and Jim Amigo

Miss Jenny a famous sharpshooter who starred in the play, <I>Mrs. William Tell</I>

Sam Bannock Jake's father, supposedly dead, who was an actor being pursued for diamonds

Wilhelmina Marlybone-Jenkins a stage actress who planned to marry Sam Bannock

Vocabulary

billing the listing of the name of a performer or act on a poster or handbill

craw a pouch in the esophagus of a bird in which food is held for later digestion

game lame

pestilential producing or tending to produce infection or disease

Synopsis

Sam Bannock, an actor, had taken Jake, his twelve-year-old son, out of boarding school and brought him to his niece Aurora's chicken farm in Blowfly, Nevada, to hide from a bounty hunter who was after Sam for stealing diamonds. Sam had gone into town with Axie, Aurora's husband, to have a doctor remove a bullet from his shoulder. Axie came back alone with a coffin, claiming Sam was thrown from a horse and had died. Sam Bannock's funeral is confusing to Jake, who last saw his dad before he left for the doctor's office.

Jake used Jim Ugly to track his dad and realized his father wasn't buried in the burying ground when Jim Ugly didn't give it so much as a glance.

After overhearing a conversation among C. W. Cornelius, Wilhelmina, and Aurora and Axie, Jake uncovered some money he had stashed, and taking a few possessions, headed toward Smoketree Junction, where his dad was last seen alive.

With a fresh scent from a bullet, Jake and Jim Ugly hop a train heading west, and Jim Ugly eventually leads Jake to an old shack where the man with the yellowleg trousers lived. The yellowleg, D. D. Skeats, asks Jake to spy to find Wilhelmina.

Jake tracks down Wilhelmina in the theater, and it is here that he is offered the role of William Tell's son. Jake learns that Wilhelmina received a letter from his Dad. Wilhelmina asks Jake to give a message to the yellowleg that he slips under his door. Eventually

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she discovers Jake is Sam Bannock's son.

In the meantime, the yellowleg realizes Jim Ugly is Sam's dog, and he threatens Jake the next time he sees him. Jake wants to leave town, but intends to pay back Miss Jenny, the star of the play, first. Instead, Miss Jenny brings him inside from the rain along with Jim Ugly, and she insists that Jake perform.

Jake travels with the theater troop to other towns. He learns that C. W. Cornelius has returned to Blowfly, and Jake suspects he is digging up his father's coffin to look for diamonds.

Aurora arrives with a letter from Jake's father. From its contents, Jake concludes his father knew nothing of the staged funeral. With the new scent from the letter, Jim Ugly begins to track again, and while in Oakland, picks up Sam's scent by the ferry dock. While avoiding the yellowleg, Jake caught a glimpse of his father boarding a trolley. Jake and Jim Ugly return to Oakland and have to be content with the knowledge that Sam Bannock is alive.

When the play moves to San Francisco, Jake writes a note to his dad telling him to keep a safe distance away, ties it around Jim Ugly's neck and lets him loose to find Sam Bannock. At the theater that evening, Sam Bannock disguises himself as an Austrian soldier and appears in the performance. Afterwards, Sam retires from the game and tells C. W. Cornelius he will lead him to the diamonds the next morning.

They return to Blowfly, and with a theatrical flare, Sam insists they be blindfolded as they ride the burros to the diamonds' location. Sam explains the real story of the diamonds to Jake. While showing Axie how well his dog could track, they saw Cornelius telling Skeats to salt a mine with junk diamonds in order for him to sell off claims and swindle people. When Sam told Cornelius he knew about his scheme, Cornelius put a bounty on Sam's head so he couldn't spread the word. Axie staged Sam's funeral and fed the diamonds to his hens in

their food.

After learning the truth about the diamonds being in the craws of the hens, Aurora faints because she had chased the chickens away. Because of their ordeal, Jim Ugly accepts Jake as his master and Jake refers to the dog as Amigo, except when he sees the wolf traits in him come out.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Jake indicates that with Jim Ugly, one doesn't know when he'll act like a dog or a wolf. Which character in the story is most like Jim Ugly in this regard?

C. W. Cornelius acts gentlemanly, but underneath lies a greedy, predatory man. D. D. Skeats seems like a wolf all the time because of his bounty hunting; however he can be mindful of his manners in the theater. Axie, because he is usually quiet and keeps to himself, yet he can be very clever and cunning.

Literary Analysis

Put yourself in Jake's place. What few possessions would you take with you if you had to leave your home quickly, without knowing if you would ever come back?

Mention may be made of pictures or some special treasure that reminds them of different family members, such as a piece of jewelry or a favorite toy of their sibling's.

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Inferential Comprehension

Jake eventually accepts the idea of Wilhelmina becoming his stepmother. What do you think caused him to come to feel this way?

Wilhelmina won Jake's respect. Although a delicate woman, ("the bones in her fingers seemed hardly bigger than a bird's"), she was able to hold her own and did not seem intimidated by C. W. Cornelius or the yellowleg, D. D. Skeats. Jake came to realize that she loved his dad and was not after him for his diamonds.

Constructing Meaning

Prior to Jake's adventure in finding his Dad, Jake lived at a boarding school while his dad traveled with the theater troop. If your parent was an actor or actress, what would you prefer to do, travel with them or stay at a boarding school? Why?

If the student would wish to travel with the parent, they could cite spending more time with their parent, seeing other parts of the country, meeting exciting people, etc. Some disadvantages may be living out of a suitcase, not having many friends and doing homework all alone. If they would stay at the boarding school, they may say it would be hard not seeing their parent(s), but they would be surrounded by kids their own age and at least have a place and routine that's familiar.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story is set in Nevada and California shortly after the turn of the century. This is a time of post-Gold Rush fever, where many people have become disillusioned by false promises of wealth. Have the students research the gold-rush era, the boom and bust town, and/or the coming of the transcontinental railroad. Have them find out if diamonds were common gems found in the Sierra Nevada mountains. If C. W. Cornelius was proposing to swindle people with reports of diamonds in the area, what does this say about the people's vulnerability?

Understanding Literary Features One theme in the story is the importance of honesty. Sam

Bannock was being hunted because he discovered C. W. Cornelius was "salting" a mine, and he would get in the way of Cornelius's plans. Ask the students to describe times when they have seen or heard something that is wrong. What did they do about it? Were they ever afraid of telling someone for fear of being hurt somehow? Children's literature contains numerous examples of people witnessing something and then running to avoid retribution. Have the children find one example of this in another story. Compare and contrast the stories. What was the reason for running? Where did they run? Did anyone follow?

Understanding Characterization Many of the characters in the story were involved in theater. Choose a scene from the book and create a skit. Assign characters. Study the characters, and think about their personality and expressions. Prepare an advertising bill, simple costumes and props. Rehearse and memorize the lines. Present the skit and get feedback. Discuss the characters, their similarities, differences and motivations.

Understanding the Author's Craft The story is told from Jake Bannock's perspective. It might be interesting to keep the first person point of view, but have the students tell the story from Jim Ugly's point of view. How would the story change? What senses would be heightened in the story telling? What is Jim Ugly's perspective of Sam Bannock? Jake? D. D. Skeats? The theater dressing rooms? Pieface? How would Jim Ugly describe tracking? Did he have emotions or was he driven purely by instinct?