



# Activity One

## Alternate Ending

From the beginning of *Old Yeller*, it was clear that Travis was going to have to shoot Old Yeller. As the book progresses, the dog and the 14-year-old build a close bond. Travis learns that his father was right and he really did need a good dog. He also realizes how lucky he was to have Old Yeller there to help.

This relationship is what makes the ending of the book so tough. Old Yeller had saved his life and the lives of his family members more than once. When Travis is forced to shoot the dog, you can imagine how hard that must have been for him.

Even though we know that Travis has a new pup and seems to be getting better by the book's close, it's still a sad way for the story to end.

So, what if it didn't have to?

Imagine you have the power to rewrite the ending and replace it with a version where Old Yeller lives. Begin your alternate ending to *Old Yeller* at the point where Travis shoots the Spot heifer. You can take the ending wherever you want—be creative—but you might want to include some detail on how Yeller recovered from his injuries.

Your alternate ending should also include the following:

- At least two new characters.
- A new setting.
- At least three returning characters.
- An interesting or exciting event.



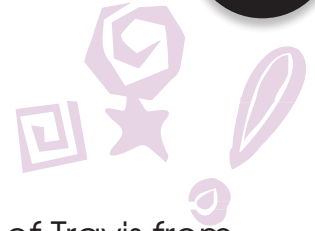
Make sure your alternate ending wraps up the story and provides a satisfying conclusion.

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# Activity Two

## Comparing Themes



One major theme in *Old Yeller* is the growth and development of Travis from boyhood into adulthood. Another theme is the added responsibility he must take on. An yet another theme is the sacrifices various characters make to protect one another.

Think of other books that feature a dog in an important role. How do you think these themes would compare?

Pick another novel, non-fiction story or movie. Compare your story to *Old Yeller*.

How are the two stories similar and how are they different? Do characters behave very different, mostly the same, or somewhere in between? What about the setting? Are the settings very different? Does this have an impact on the story?

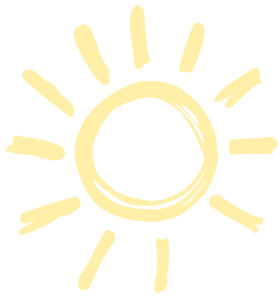
Use these questions to provide an outline for a written comparison of the two stories. Your write-up should answer all of the questions asked above. It should give a conclusion that details how close the stories were overall.

Some questions to consider in your conclusion are:

- How closely do the themes of the two stories match?
- How are the human characters influenced by their dogs?
- How do the dogs in the stories compare? Do they seem to have any human characteristics or emotions attributed to them?
- How does the setting affect the behavior of the characters? How does it affect the themes?
- Do all stories that have dogs in a major role have similar themes?

Your write-up should be at least three typed, double-spaced pages in length. It should answer all of these questions. Be sure to include the name of the story you chose and a brief summary of the plot.

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## Activity Three

### Mystery Varmint



"He told how some strange varmint that wasn't a coyote, possum, skunk, or coon had recently started robbing the settlement blind. Or maybe it was even somebody. Nobody could tell for sure. All they knew was that they were losing meat out of their smokehouses, eggs out of their hens' nests, and sometimes even whole pans of cornbread that the womenfolks had set out to cool. Ike Fuller had been barbecuing some meat over an open pit and left for a minute to go get a drink of water and came back to find that a three- or four-pound chunk of beef ribs had disappeared like it had gone up in smoke." - Old Yeller, Chapter 6

The people around the Salt Licks area are getting fairly riled about the mystery varmint. They've decided to contact a newspaper to see if they will investigate the issue. Imagine you are the writer for this newspaper. You must find the truth behind the thievery.

You will write an article that will try to shed some light on the problem. You can write this as a traditional news article, or present it as a blog post. You will interview all of the people who have been affected. These can be people mentioned by name in the book, like Ike Fuller or Lisbeth Searcy. They can be characters created entirely by your imagination.

Your first paragraph should be short and snappy. It should give the who, what, when where, why and how of the story. In other words, it should mention the problem. It should mention where it's happening. It should mention who is affected by it without being too long.

Need some examples of how to write in the appropriate style? Read your local newspaper or find some news articles online. Your finished product should be at least two typed, double-spaced pages in length. It should include:

- Interviews with at least three affected characters.
- Any evidence that has been found so far.
- Any suggestions from characters as to who might be behind the thefts.
- An interview with an authority figure.

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# Activity Four

## Picturing the Homestead



The area around the Coates' cabin is described in some detail throughout the book. However, these descriptions are given just a little bit at a time. This can make it hard to fully picture what the setting really looks like.

In this activity, you will go back through the book. Specifically pay close attention to any descriptions of the Coates' homestead. These can be from fence lines to buildings, to natural features.

Write all of the information down as you find it. Be sure to write neatly, write in point form, and be as accurate as possible. This piece of paper will be included on your finished product. Gather as much information on the setting as possible. Then, translate those words into a map. The map will outline the entire homestead, the surrounding areas, and any significant feature mentioned in the book.

Draw as best you can and label all the features that you found described in the book. Finish drawing, labeling and coloring your map. Then, glue or tape your point form descriptions to the back.

Draw your maps individually. Work with a partner to discuss any differences between the two drawings. Outline where and why your maps are different. Together, write up a short summary of these differences. Share with the class. Exchange ideas between the class and your pair.

Finally, take a large sheet of paper or poster board. Divide it into enough sections to give each pair one square sheet. On this sheet, each pair will use their imagination to design their perfect homestead. When each group is finished, the pieces can be reassembled to create your class's 1860s settlement.

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# Activity Five

## GAMES!



If there's one thing that Travis learned while Papa was away, it's how much work goes into keeping up crops and livestock. By the time his father comes home, Travis has to be exhausted!

Let's imagine that Papa has asked Travis to take some time off. Travis has decided to spend his time watching Little Arliss. To do this, Travis has decided to make his own board game.

In this activity, you will take on Travis' role. You will try to come up with a new idea for a board game. This game will entertain yourself and your young sibling. You can use inspiration from your own life (or Travis' life) to come up with the design for your game. You can use some aspects of current games as long as the main idea of the game is your own.

The game should be playable by two to six players. It should have some sort of turn-based system. You can use dice, spinners, cards or anything else you might find in a typical board game. Try not to use anything too advanced, like the Internet or electronics. This board game should only use technology that was available in the 1860s.

This activity can be done in pairs or in larger groups. When you've finished your games, get into groups of three to six. Take turns playing a round of each of the games created by your fellow students. Once you've had a chance to play each game, write a short paragraph about which game you liked the most and explain why.

Each game should include:

- A game board.
- Tokens or pieces that represent each player.
- An interesting original design.
- Information relevant to the book.

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# Activity Six

## Character Characteristics



At first, Old Yeller is scared of Travis. However, Old Yeller protects Travis with his life. At first, Travis doesn't like Old Yeller. However, Travis pushes through pain to save him.

The two main heroes of this story may be different species, but they do share some traits. In this activity, you will try to describe both characters using descriptive words or short phrases. Start by drawing a three-circled Venn diagram. A Venn diagram lets you compare different character traits between each character. It lets you compare traits that all three characters share.

Label one circle Travis and another Old Yeller. Who occupies the third circle will be left partially to you. You must decide who the opponent or enemy is within Old Yeller. Is it old Bud Searcy? Is it the wolves? Once you decide, label the last circle.

Now, use the Venn diagram to compare each character. Your enemy's traits should help explain why you think this character is the enemy within the story. What traits do Travis and Old Yeller share? Old Yeller and the enemy? The enemy and Travis? What makes them different? Your diagram should shed some light on these questions.

Once finished, write a short summary outlining what your diagram tells you or anyone else looking at it. It should be a few paragraphs long.

Finish your summary with a conclusion that captures your thoughts about what you discovered through this exercise.

