

NOVEL GUIDE C.3 – The Captain's Dog

Roland Smith was born and reared in Portland, Oregon. Early in his adult life, Mr. Smith knew that he wanted to be a writer. While in college, he took a part-time job at the local zoo and eventually became a full-time animal keeper. This job took him all over the world and gave him the experiences that he would later incorporate in his books. Mr. Smith's nonfiction works include *Journey of the Red Wolf*, *In the Forest with Elephants*, and *Sea Otter Rescue*. Works of fiction are *Sasquatch*, *Amy's Missing*, and the Jake Lansa books *Thunder Cave*, *Jaguar*, and *The Last Lobo*. *Jaguar* was selected as the novel of the year for the JASON Project and also won the Young Adults Choice award given in 1999 by the International Reading Association.

The journey begins...

Instead of having a human tell the story in this book, the author has made a dog the main storyteller. Using the perspective of this dog, we can look at the Corps of Discovery's expedition from a different point of view. At the beginning of each chapter, the author gives us a point of reference from the actual journals written by Lewis or Clark. Compare these entries with the ones given in your readings. What differences can you see? Why do you believe that the author uses this version of the captain's journals?

Charting the course...

The Captain's Dog begins in the year 1808, two years after the corps returned east. Two of the original members are given a diary written by Meriwether Lewis, one of the leaders of the Corps of Discovery. Within earshot of Seaman, a Newfoundland dog, men begin to reminisce about their journey. Seaman listens to their account of the journey and tells his version of the expedition.

While reading, think about how perspective can change your attitude or understanding of a historical event. Look for instances in this story of when the actual event is slightly changed because of the storyteller's perspective. Take notes about a few of these differences. You will refer to these notes while drawing a cartoon strip after you finish reading.

Journey's end...

After finishing the book, recall the details of the book and the actual journal. Look for the differences in perspective. Can you think about any other books that might have been told from a different point of view? Discuss this possibility with members of your class. Take one possibility and write a short synopsis of this new version.

Using the notes that you took while reading the book, draw a four-frame comic strip from the dog's perspective of an event. Then draw a four-frame strip from the human's view of the event.

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Another of Roland Smith's books called *Zach's Lie* tells about a young man, Zach Granger, who has many lies to tell. For one, his name is really Jack Osborne, and, for another, his parents aren't divorced. In prison for transporting drugs to a ruthless cartel, Zach's father cooperates with the DEA and his family is moved into the witness protection program. The family's fear of its whereabouts being discovered by the cartel never subsides. Zach misses his father and struggles with his complicated emotions and the cost of living a lie.

The Salt Cairns

One of the chores that the men of the expedition needed to complete while at Fort Clatsop was to prepare food for the return trip to St. Louis. Over three bushels of salt were needed to preserve this food. The expedition had a vast supply of salt close at hand in the Pacific Ocean. Five members of the corps traveled the short distance overland from Fort Clatsop to the Pacific Ocean, arriving near present-day Seaside, Oregon.

Taking the salt from the ocean water was a long and tedious process. Records show that five men worked for weeks. Three men were constantly at work boiling more than 1400 gallons of water in five brass kettles.

Willapa Bay oysters

The oysters found in Willapa Bay are native to the western United States and Canada. As the desire for oysters increased while the West was settled, more and more were harvested. The oysters were such a delicacy during the California Gold Rush that ships sailed to the area with loads of timber or supplies. They sailed south filled with Willapa Bay oysters. Oyster bed owners were paid in gold.

Towns grew up over night near Willapa Bay. By the summer of 1854, fortune seekers, fishermen, and shopkeepers arrived in the new city of Oysterville. Now a sleepy little community at the north end of the Long Beach Peninsula, Oysterville once boasted three hotels, a school, a church, boat shops, blacksmith stables, barbershops, three saloons, a tannery, sail shops, and no fewer than four general stores.