The Incredible Journey tells the story of three brave animals and their journey across the wild countryside of northwest Ontario, Canada. Together they travel over four hundred kilometers in order to be reunited with their beloved owners. It’s a dangerous and difficult trip for all the animals, and there are many unexpected adventures on the way. But finally, all the animals arrive home safely.

The story begins at the home of John Longridge, a man in his forties, who is looking after three animals for his friend, Jim Hunter. The animals are Luath, the young Labrador; Tao, the proud Siamese cat; and Bodger, the old bull terrier. A misunderstanding between John and his housekeeper, Mrs. Oakes, means that the animals set off on their journey home without anybody realizing that they are missing.

Early in the journey, a baby bear attacks Bodger, but Tao fights off the bear and his mother. Bodger is badly injured, but Tao helps him to recover by catching food for him. The animals continue their difficult journey, occasionally meeting kind or strange people along the way. Later, Tao is swept away in a river flood and nearly drowns. He has a narrow escape from a dangerous wild cat, too, before he is reunited with his two friends.

Towards the end of the book, the Hunter family returns from the UK to their home. By this time, John has realized that the animals are missing, and the hunt to find them begins. With the help of the police and local people, John and Jim begin to build a picture of the journey that the animals were making. But the two men agree that the animals are probably dead after several weeks in the wild Canadian countryside.

A few weeks later, only Jim’s daughter, Elizabeth, is still hoping that the animals might still be alive. The Hunters and John decide to go on a trip together to a beautiful place by a lake. It is here Jim’s son, Peter, first hears Luath’s bark. Then, one by one, the animals come out of the wild forest to meet their owners. They are thin, weak, tired, and hungry. But, at last, they are home with the people they love.

The Incredible Journey is a Disney classic. It shows the beauty of the Canadian landscape as well as the incredible love and dedication of the movie is a Disney classic. It shows the beauty of the Canadian landscape as well as the incredible love and dedication of the world as well as the incredible love and dedication of the animal's owner reflects the personality type of his or her pet: Luath and Bodger and Peter are both quiet and very brave. The story takes place in northwest Ontario, Canada – a wild and lonely place where day-to-day survival is difficult and humans must learn to live in harmony with nature. When Bodger visits the North American Indian settlement (Chapter 4), the people are cooking simple food, meat and rice, on an open fire. Other characters in the book too, such as the Nurmi family, live very simple lives. They eat vegetables that they grow on their small farms, and catch fish and meat in the streams and forests around them.

Although this type of country life seems charming, danger is never far away. All the men carry guns for protection as well as to kill animals for meat. In Chapter 8 we see a young boy protecting himself from a dangerous wild lynx by shooting the animal dead. He has to kill or be killed, and this is the way of life for him and all the people and animals around him. Quick reactions, strong instinct, and opportunism are key elements of survival in this environment.

Sheila Burnford subtly shows the reader that, even in remote areas, people form networks of mutual support to help each other solve problems. At the beginning of the book, John Longridge does not hesitate in offering to look after his friend’s animals while he is in England. And, in Chapter 7, we learn how young Helvi Nurmi supports her parents by reading to them and acting as a link to the wider community. When John phones the police for help in finding the missing animals, it is not long before dozens of people are calling with information and offers of help and support.

The animals, too, rely on each other's strengths to work as a team and survive together. Luath’s determination and encouragement keep the animals always moving onwards. Tao looks after his weaker, older friend Bodger by catching food for him and by protecting him from dangerous animals, such as the baby bear in Chapter 3. Bodger’s friendly, opportunistic character means that he can find kind humans to help the other animals when they are in trouble. In this way, the book uses animals to display qualities that are admirable in humans. Each animal’s owner reflects the personality type of his or her pet; Luath and John are both loyal and practical; Tao and Elizabeth are both kind and pretty; and Bodger and Peter are both quiet and very brave.

Using animals to tell a story about human relationships is a very old tradition. Ancient legends and myths from around the world often feature animals as the main characters. Aesop’s famous animal stories were written 2,500 years ago, and his style was copied by famous writers such as Chaucer (England, fourteenth century), La Fontaine (France, seventeenth century) and the Grimm brothers (Germany, nineteenth century).

Sheila Burnford was born in Scotland in 1918. When her children were young she also had three animals that were loved and looked after as part of the family. She decided to write a book about the special loyalty of family pets and wrote The Incredible Journey in 1961. Although the book was successful, it was not until 1963, when Disney turned the book into a movie, that it became well known worldwide. Today, many people agree that this old black-and-white movie is a Disney classic. It shows the beauty of the Canadian landscape as well as the incredible love and dedication of the animals. It’s also an exciting adventure story that remains popular with both children and adults today.

In 1993 Disney remade the movie for a younger generation. Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey changes Sheila Burnford’s original story in some ways, but the heart-warming qualities of the original adventure remain.
Teacher’s Notes

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader, and supplement those exercises. Further supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found on the photocopiable Student’s Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1. Ask students to look at the front cover of the book. What does it tell them about the story? Where do they think the story takes place? Finally, ask students who or what they think undertakes the “incredible journey” of the title.

2. Put students into groups and give them five minutes to choose an animal story that they are all familiar with. Each group should then prepare a short talk for the rest of the class. Each group member should have some part to play in relating the story to the rest of the class. Alternatively, ask students to work individually and to write a few sentences about their favourite animal story.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Chapters 1–3

Ask students to draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. They should write before at the top of the left-hand column and after at the top of the right-hand column. Now tell them to write words or sentences in each column to describe the animals’ lives before their incredible journey began and after it started. Students can work individually or in pairs for this activity.

Chapters 4–7

Put students into groups of three. In each group one person is Bodger, one person is Tao, and one person is Luath. Each group chooses a key event from chapters 4 to 7 (visiting the Indians, crossing the river, etc.) Give the students about ten or fifteen minutes to write a few sentences about their chosen event from their character’s point of view. (They should not use any of the animals’ names in their sentences.) Finally, each group reads their sentences to the rest of the class, and the other students must identify the characters and key events for each group.

Chapters 8–11

Chapter 11 begins, “Longridge’s telephone never stopped ringing.”

Ask students to work in pairs and act out one of the telephone conversations that Longridge has at this time. One student is Longridge and the other student chooses to be: Helvi Nurmi, old Jeremy Aubyn, or James Mackenzie.

Give students time to prepare their conversations. Encourage them to think about what kind of information the people may give to Longridge. And what questions does John ask?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. Students work in pairs (Student A and Student B). Student A chooses one of the pictures in the book and describes the scene to Student B. Student B closes the book and tries to draw the picture from Student A’s description. How accurate are the drawings?

2. Ask students to invent new chapter headings for the book. They should choose short, clear titles which reflect the meaning and content of the chapter they describe. Finally, choose some good examples from the class and write them on the board. Students look at the board and try to guess which chapters are which.

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the new words found on page 57 of the Reader. They are practised in the ‘Before you read’ sections at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those used in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)
Students can do these activities alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Look at the front cover of The Incredible Journey. What do you think the animals are like? Write four or five words to describe each animal. You will have to guess some words (Do you think one of the animals is brave? Or clever? etc.) Later you can look at your words again. How many words did you get right?

ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

Chapters 1–3

Chapter 1

1 Match the first half of sentences (a–g) with the second half (1–7).
   (a) The animals make their “incredible journey”…
   (b) Mrs. Oakes cooks John’s main meals and …
   (c) Longridge and his brother go …
   (d) The Hunter family go …
   (e) Peter Hunter cannot remember a time without …
   (f) The animals are comfortable with John except …
   (g) One of the pages of John’s note flew …
   (1) … Luath. He misses his owner .
   (2) … to their cabin, 300 kilometers away .
   (3) … in Ontario, Canada, in the fall.
   (4) … into the air, and into the fire.
   (5) … Bodger, the old bull terrier .
   (6) … to England for nine months.
   (7) … looks after his house for him.

2 What is John Longridge’s house like? Write a short paragraph to describe it. You can look at the picture on page 5 to help you.

Chapter 2

1 Are these sentences about Luath (L), Bodger (B) or Tao (T)?
   (a) He puts his paw in John’s hand before John drives away.
   (b) He is the first to walk down the road.
   (c) He cannot see out of his left eye.
   (d) He is curious, and often stops to look at things.
   (e) He becomes exhausted after the first day of the incredible journey.
   (f) He hunts in the middle of the night.

2 Why does John think the animals are safe? Why does Mrs. Oakes think they are safe? Why are they both wrong?

Chapter 3

1 Put these events into the correct order.
   (a) The young bear hits Bodger with his paw, and plays with Bodger like a toy.
   (b) Bodger becomes tired and lies down to rest.
   (c) The mother bear hears her baby’s cries and comes out of the forest.
   (d) Both bears disappear into the trees.
   (e) Tao attacks the young bear to protect Bodger.
   (f) Suddenly, a young bear comes out of the woods towards Bodger.
   (g) Tao gives fresh meat to Bodger for the first time.

2 At this stage in the journey which animal is the strongest? Why?

Chapters 4–7

Chapter 4

1 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?
   (a) The Labrador is a skillful hunter.
   (b) The North American Indians are cooking meat and rice.
   (c) One of the children cries when he sees Bodger.
   (d) The Indians give meat to all of the animals.
   (e) Bodger is stronger after some rest and food.
   (f) The Indians soon forgot their visitors.

2 How does Luath call his friends away from the Indians? Why does he call them? Do they follow Luath right away?

Chapter 5

1 Complete each sentence with a word from the box.
   carefully comfortably kindly politely sleepily
   (a) In the warm forest leaves, the animals sleep …
   (b) The bear was not dangerous – it looked at the animals …
   (c) The old man smiled … at Bodger and invited the animals to his home.
   (d) The old man ate his supper …
   (e) The animals were hungry, but they sat on the floor …

2 Tell the story about the old man and the three animals in your own words. What do you think about the old man? Why doesn’t he give the animals any food?
Chapter 6

1 Read this paragraph about Chapter 6 and choose the correct answer in italics.

Luath looks for a (a) shallow/wide place to cross the river. Bodger is a (b) good/weak swimmer (c) so/but he soon joins Luath on the other side of the river. Tao does not like water and he shows the first (d) signs/cries of fear. When Tao (e) is/has swimming, the (f) water/dam breaks and a wave passes over the cat. A large piece of (g) wood/water hits the cat on the head and he is (h) carried/waved away. The (i) same/next day the dogs continue their journey (j) with/without Tao.

2 Is the cat alive or dead? Give reasons for your answers.

Chapter 7

1 Answer these questions.

(a) Who finds Tao?
(b) Does Mrs. Nurmi want to save Tao, too?
(c) How does Mr. Nurmi save Tao?
(d) Who wants to keep Tao as a pet?
(e) Why doesn’t Tao notice the bird when it flies near him?
(f) Can young Helvi Nurmi speak English?
(g) How long does Tao stay with the Nurmis?

2 Why does Helvi want a pet, do you think?

Chapters 8–11

Chapter 8

1 Are these sentences about Luath (L), Bodger (B), both dogs (BD) or neither dog (ND)? Write the correct letter(s) in the spaces.

(a) … travel(s) sadly without the cat.
(b) Tao is (c)’s oldest friend.
(c) … is/are very hungry.
(d) … don’t/doesn’t want to meet any humans.
(e) … knock(s) the farm dog over.
(f) … is/are travelling behind the other animals.
(g) There is a lynx following …
(h) … knock(s) Tao over when they meet again.

2 In your own words describe Tao’s adventure with the lynx.

Chapter 9

1 Which of these things happen in Chapter 9?

(a) Tao catches food for Luath.
(b) The Hunter family comes home.
(c) The animals are attacked by another bear.
(d) Luath’s bad tooth becomes very painful.
(e) A man throws a bowl of water at Bodger.
(f) All the animals sleep in the Mackenzies’ house.
(g) Luath carries James Mackenzie’s dead bird to him.
(h) Luath becomes very strong again.

2 At the end of Chapter 9 the animals start to walk the last eighty kilometers of their journey. How does the author describe this last part of the journey? What problems will the animals face?

Chapter 10

1 Chapter 10 is about the people in the story, not the animals. How do they all feel in this chapter? Complete each sentence with the best word from the box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>excited</th>
<th>hopeful</th>
<th>lonely</th>
<th>sure</th>
<th>worried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
(a) Peter and Elizabeth Hunter feel … about seeing their pets again.
(b) John Longridge is … when he returns home to an empty house.
(c) Mrs. Oakes feels … that the animals are dead.
(d) Longridge is … that the animals are still alive.
(e) When Tao left the Nurmi family, Helvi felt … again.

2 What reasons does Mrs. Oakes give for believing that the animals are dead?

Chapter 11

1 Read these sentences and look at the words in italics. Who or what are they?

(a) “They’re all trying to be helpful. And some of them really did see our pets.”
(b) “He’ll come home soon. I don’t believe that he’s dead. You’ll see.”
(c) He gets a camera for his twelfth birthday.
(d) “Wait, wait! You’ll hear it in a minute too.”
(e) He put his brown paws lovingly around her neck.
(f) They walked up the hill and talked about everything, but not dogs.
(g) Thin and tired, he was coming as fast as he could!
(h) John Longridge turned and left them in the private world of boy and dog.

2 Look at the picture on page 51. You are Peter. What are you thinking? How do you feel? (You probably have “mixed feelings.” Try to explain them.)

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

1 Which of the animals is your favourite? Write five reasons why you like this animal best.

2 Look at the word list on page 57. Write a short description of the story using at least ten of these words.