

# SERGEANT Reckless

Written by PATRICIA McCORMICK

Illustrated by IACOPO BRUNO



## EDUCATORS' GUIDE

Grades 1–5

### About the Book

Sergeant Reckless, a small horse with a sweet tooth and a heart of gold, is the only animal ever to have held official military rank, first as a private and then as a sergeant in the Korean War. In this heartwarming true story, Reckless and the U.S. Marines who found and trained her share meals and card games. And then they risk their lives together in battle. Patricia McCormick's vibrant narrative and Jacopo Bruno's striking illustrations beautifully convey the close bond between Sergeant Reckless and the marines who loved her.

### Before Reading

Have a class discussion about what it means to be a hero, in war and in peace. Expand the discussion to whether or not an animal can be considered a hero. Invite students to offer specific examples of human and animal heroes, based on what students have read or heard about such heroes.

### Discussion Questions

1. Describe Private Reckless's appearance based on the text and pictures. Analyze her personality, giving specific examples. Explain why the marines named her "Reckless." Why did they decide to keep and train her? What were some of her habits? Do you agree with the subtitle that Reckless was a hero? Why or why not?
2. In what ways was food important to Reckless? Recount some of the anecdotes about the horse and eating, naming specific foods and other objects she ate. Talk about the photograph of her at the end of the author's note. Do you think that her interactions with food make Reckless seem similar to humans? Why or why not?
3. Where and when does this true story take place? What does this book convey about the Korean War and those who fought it? Read the headlines on the front endpapers. What does the word "Red" mean in this context? What does the map on the first page show about Korea?
4. Private Reckless was trained by Sergeant Joseph Latham. What specific skills and tasks did he teach her? How did he train her? Give examples of what he used to reward her. What's a packsaddle? What did Latham and the others expect Reckless to do when she was fitted with one, and how did she surprise them?
5. How does the front cover, including the book's subtitle, set the mood for the story? What aspects of the cover might attract a reader to pick up this book? Look at the endpapers at the front of the book and at the illustration on the title page. How do they continue to set the tone? Look at the endpapers at the back of the book and at the book's back cover. How do they help wrap up the story?
6. Why were the men worried about Reckless before the first skirmish? What did they think might happen? What actually took place? During the later battle, what happened to Reckless? How did she help the men and help win the battle? How did they reward her during the battle and help protect her?
7. The marines promoted Private Reckless to sergeant after the cease-fire. What was unique about that promotion? What did the marines do to help Reckless when they returned to the United States? How did the Marine Corps honor her with medals? Find your answers in the narrative and in the author's note.
8. How do the illustrations provide the reader with information about the location, the horse, the marines, and their daily lives? Choose a picture that spreads across two pages and analyze it in detail. What information from the narrative is shown in the pictures? What information does the illustration add that isn't mentioned in the text?
9. How do the pictures express the personalities and emotions of Reckless and the men? How do they convey the experience of battle? Choose another picture that spreads across two pages and talk about how it expresses emotional content, pointing to specific details. What emotional elements of the picture are not mentioned in the text?
10. Observe the way the text is printed throughout the book. Why are some words larger than others? What effect does that have on the reader? Identify some of the objects that serve as a background for the text, such as a playing card. Why do the illustrations use those backgrounds? What does it add?

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### Classroom Activities

**Sit! Heel! Carry a Basket!** Have students discuss Sergeant Latham's techniques for training Reckless. Then, as a class, watch the American Kennel Club video on dog training, "Teach Your Dog How to Carry a Basket," which shows how to teach a practical skill such as Reckless learned: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIQBP5Hlvu8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIQBP5Hlvu8). After watching, have the class discuss similarities and differences in how the dog is taught and how Reckless was taught.

**Reckless Around the World.** As a class, make a list of all the places mentioned in the narrative and the author's note. Have students locate the places on a world map. Then have pairs of students choose one of the places and do simple research using print or digital resources. The pairs should find five interesting facts about the place they researched and report back to the class about what they found.

**Animals Heroes and Helpers.** Have students gather in small groups and brainstorm different ways that animals help humans. They could refer to true stories or fiction in their discussion. Then each student should write a short story about an animal who helps one person or a group of people. Have students share their stories in small groups and compare their content.

**Back Matter Matters.** The extra information at the end of a book is called the back matter. In this book, it consists of an author's note, a selected bibliography, and additional illustrations, including a photograph. Have your students reread the author's note and jot down three facts

that it adds to the narrative. Lead a discussion about the purpose of the author's note, including the pictures. The author mentions interviewing the marines cook who knew Reckless and lists the interview in the bibliography. Have students discuss the role of interviews in research and how the interview might have enriched the story.

The activities in this guide can be correlated to the following Common Core State Standards:  
CCSS (Reading Informational Text): RI.2-4.1, RI.2-4.2, RI.2-4.3, RI.2-4.4, RI.2-3.5, RI.4.6, RI.2-4.7,  
CCSS (Speaking and Listening): SL.2-4.1  
CCSS (Writing): W.2-4.3, W.2-4.7



Photo by Costas Picadas

### About the Author

**PATRICIA McCORMICK** is a former journalist and a two-time National Book Award finalist whose books include *Cut, Sold, Never Fall Down*, *The Plot to Kill Hitler*, and the young readers edition of *I Am Malala*. Patricia lives in New York. You can visit her online at [www.pattymccormick.com](http://www.pattymccormick.com).



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