

# The Desert Run

by John Bonallack



## Book Summary

John Bonallack and his son, Dan, take part in the “toughest footrace on Earth!” This true account of their grueling run through the Sahara Desert is in the form of a diary, with maps to show their progress day by day.

## Features of the Book

- The diary format
- The safety issues
- Footnotes that provide additional information
- The use of maps
- Distances in parentheses
- The day-by-day progress shown by the maps and the “dog tag”
- Lists to summarize information
- Place names – Casablanca, Ouarzazate, Sahara, Tazzarine, Rissani

## Purpose

*The Desert Run* can be used to introduce and reinforce the following skills:

- S** using a diary to record information, feelings, and ideas;
- S** using graphic aids, such as maps and graphs, to convey information;
- S** exploring specialized vocabulary;
- S** using electronic media to research a topic.

## The Guided Reading Lesson

- S** Using a diary to record information, feelings, and ideas
- S** Using graphic aids, such as maps and graphs, to convey information
- S** Exploring specialized vocabulary

## Introducing the text

Discuss the topic of long-distance running races with the group. Look through informational books on the Sahara and the surrounding region before using the text with the students.

- Do you know what a really long running race is called?
- Can you tell from the cover of the book where this story might take place?
- Why would someone want to run in a place like that? How would they prepare for it?
- What words would you use to describe the scene in the photographs on the cover and title page?
- If you were taking part in this race, what kinds of things would you need to be careful about? (heat, getting lost, wild animals)

Look through the list of equipment on page 4. Answer any questions the students may have about the items and what they are for. Discuss the map on page 6 and work out the route John and Dan took to get to the beginning of the race. Look briefly at the legend for the map as this also relates to the maps that begin each chapter.

## Reading and discussing the text

Ask the students to read the first chapter of the book independently.

- *What problems and worries might John and Dan have had on their minds before they even got to the start of the race?*

When all the students have finished reading, encourage them to discuss the purpose-setting question together and to provide evidence from the text for their suggestions. Responses might include:

- They might be worried about the heat in the day and the cold at night.
- How would they be able to carry enough food and equipment?
- What if they met snakes or scorpions?
- What would happen if the race were too hard for them?

Look at the beginning of chapter 2 together and read the explanation next to the “dog tag.” Ask the students to look at how the dog tag changes as the race progresses.

The students can now read the rest of the book independently. Encourage them to study the map at the beginning of each leg of the race before reading the text. This shows the section of the race ran that day and allows them to compare the length of each day’s run.

- *What kinds of things does the author say that makes you think that the race might be getting harder as time goes on?* (“The running was hot and hard ... I didn’t have the energy to run ... I just kept going the best I could.”)
- *When does he start to think differently?* (page 28)

When the students have finished reading, discuss the author’s feelings about the race.


- *How did he feel as he was preparing for his adventure?*
- *Why do you think the author felt so emotional on page twenty-four?*
- *How did he feel at the end?* (“I was happy to still be standing – happy just to have done it.”)

## Revisiting the Text

The suggested activities below can be used immediately after the guided reading lesson if appropriate or could be taken as a mini-lesson at a later time.

- S** Using a diary to record information, feelings, and ideas


The students could compare this text with another account in diary form, such as *Canoe Diary* by Nic Bishop.

-  List the diary features that are common in both texts, for example, dates in sequence.
  - *Do both authors use their diaries to record the same kinds of things?* (both record facts and feelings)

- S** Using graphic aids, such as maps and graphs, to convey information

The maps in this book play an important role in the way information is presented to the reader. Discuss the probable reasons for including them and making them such a prominent feature. Discuss the conventions commonly used in the presentation of maps, for example:

- the use of a legend
- the direction of north
- the way a section can be presented in an enlarged form to show more detail.

-  Ask the students to use the blackline master on page 80 to draw a map as a way of marking the different stages of a journey they have made.

- S** Using electronic media to research a topic

Suggest that the students use the Internet to research either the marathon written about in the story (the Marathon des Sables) or the Sahara Desert and the surrounding region. The students should be prepared to present further information to the rest of the group explaining how they did the research. You should preview any website before allowing the students access.