



I AM REBEL

ABOUT THE BOOK

This beautifully crafted testament to the love that can exist between a boy and a dog will stay with readers long after they have finished the book. Narrated by Rebel—a rescued dog devoted to twelve-year-old Tom—the novel brings new perspectives to the motivations behind human actions. When Tom disappears with the “Reds,” Rebel realizes only he can bring Tom back to their perfect life on the farm. But when Rebel is swept up in a war far bigger than he can understand, he’ll need all the help he can get from the friends and animals he meets along the way. Even so, there are greater truths to learn if he ever wants to bring Tom home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ross Montgomery started writing stories as a teenager, when he should have been doing homework, and continued doing so at university. His debut novel, *Alex, the Dog and the Unopenable Door*, was nominated for the Costa Children’s Book Award and the Branford Boase Award and was named one of the top 100 children’s books by the London *Sunday Times*. His books have also been nominated for the Carnegie Medal, and his picture book *Space Tortoise*, illustrated by David Litchfield, was nominated for the Kate Greenaway Medal and included in *The Guardian’s* Best New Children’s Books of 2018. *The Midnight Guardians*, his first novel with Walker Books, was selected as a Waterstones Children’s Book of the Month and short-listed for the Costa Children’s Book Award. Ross Montgomery lives in London with his wife and their cat, Fun Bobby.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I Am Rebel brings a refreshing perspective to the animal and war genres of children’s books and through Rebel’s own narration opens up avenues of intrigue and exploration for young readers. With plenty to discuss and lots of opportunities for extending research and creativity, Montgomery’s latest novel is full of action and adventure, yet is also underpinned by a thoughtfulness and philosophical exploration of war, friendship, love, and family. While the book is fantasy, care should be taken if any of its themes reflect lived experiences of group members, and appropriate support should be put in place up front.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting Started

Ask what the group liked about the book. Why? Can anyone expand on their answer? Was it like any other books anyone has read? How was it different? What was their favorite part? Why?

1. Rebel

“At this point, I should probably mention that I’m a dog.” (p. 4)

How does experiencing the novel from Rebel’s perspective change the reading experience? What effect does it have knowing how Rebel feels? What does it offer that you wouldn’t experience if the story were told from a different perspective? What do you miss or not find out as a reader? Can you think of other stories told from a nonhuman perspective? How are these stories similar? How are they different?

2. Tom

“Wherever Tom goes, I go too. I’m his dog, and he’s my boy. I would die for him if I had to.” (p. 8)

Why does Tom leave the farm? Why does he leave Rebel behind? Who agrees with what Tom does? Who thinks he should have stayed at the farm with his family? Why?

EXTENSION: Challenge group members to write from Tom’s perspective. They could rewrite an episode from the book through Tom’s thoughts or choose to imagine Tom on his journey with the Reds. What would he be thinking? How would he feel toward Rebel? Toward his family?

3. The Farm

“I love the farm. I’ve lived on it every day of my life, ever since Tom found me as a puppy and brought me home to live with him.” (p. 6)

What does the farm represent to Rebel? What does it represent to Tom? Tom’s parents forbid him from engaging with Rider or the Reds—why? Are they right? Why does Tom lie to them?

4. Rider

“And while we’re here, we’re looking for a man in a wolfskin. He’s been spotted in the area. He’s dangerous—a troublemaker.” (p. 19)

How is Rider first revealed to the reader? What informs Rebel’s opinion of Rider? Does the reader feel differently? Why? What changes in Rebel’s opinion? How did you feel about Rider by the end?

5. Grandad and Pol

“She smells of wool and woodsmoke and the forest after it rains.” (p. 137)

How are Grandad and Pol different from the other humans in the book? Do they see the world differently? What is significant about their life up on the mountainside? How involved are they in the wider backdrop of the book?

6. Jaxon

“Jaxon snorts. ‘Following orders? Begging for food? Doesn’t sound like much of a life to me.’” (p. 79)

How is Jaxon different from Rebel? What is the difference between a wild dog and a kept dog? What does this mean for Jaxon? How would you describe the friendship between Jaxon and Rebel? Why does Rebel prevent Jaxon from living on the farm? Why is the home on the mountain better for him?

7. Animal Traits

“Well! Isn’t that polite? My name’s Pearl, dearie; nice to meet you.” (p. 115)

Do animals have personalities? If so, in what way? How do we understand this? Together, recall the other animals Rebel meets on his adventures. As a group, create a list of the types of animals and their names. What characteristics does each animal have? Do these reflect the way we think about or treat those animals?



8. Perfect Days

“Why would it change, when it’s already so perfect?” (p. 14)

Rebel believes every day on the farm to be perfect, while Jaxon distrusts people on the grounds that one day they’ll forget about a dog. By the end, both dogs have changed their minds. Discuss how they come to feel about the idea of a perfect day and the idea of having an owner. If you have a pet, what’s your relationship with your pet like? Can you imagine how your pet might think?

EXTENSION: Challenge the group to write a “perfect day” for an animal they know, from the animal’s perspective. It could be their pet, a friend’s pet, or a wild animal they’ve seen or read about. How would the animal think? What would make a day perfect for that animal? How will the animal’s “voice” suggest their character?

9. War

“A handful of shepherds with red rags tied around their necks aren’t going to win a war against the *King*, Tom!” (p. 24)

Why are the Reds waging war against the King? What are the implications of the war in the book? Why are some willing to risk joining the Reds? Why are some not willing? Does Rebel understand the war? Does the war in the book feel real to you?

10. Art

“People need to see what’s possible. A picture like *that* could change people’s minds faster than words ever can.” (p. 31)

How important are Tom’s drawings in the book? Why? What is their significance? How does Rider respond to Tom’s art, compared to Tom’s dad’s response? Why does this matter? What power does art have in the book and in the real world? Why? What makes Tom’s drawings so effective? Can you think of an example where art has been used to try to recruit people to a cause? As appropriate for your group, discuss the idea of art as activism, propaganda, and political statement.

