



Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com Phone: (407) 212-7759

Family Reading Guide for "We Also Served"

Conversation starters for parents and children

Getting Started

What This Book Is About

"We Also Served: True Stories of Brave Animals in the Military" collects true accounts of animals who have served alongside military forces throughout history—carrier pigeons, dogs, horses, elephants, and more—whose loyalty, courage, and specialized abilities contributed to military success in ways that often went unrecognized. Written and illustrated by Erin McGill, the book honors these remarkable animals with historically grounded, emotionally genuine storytelling that is perfect for animal lovers, military families, and anyone who loves a true story of unexpected heroism.

Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Service and sacrifice:** The animals in this book served without choosing to—their contribution was real, their loyalty extraordinary, and many gave everything they had
- **The human-animal bond:** The partnerships between soldiers and animals were often deeply personal, and the stories reflect that intimacy alongside the professional purpose
- **Military history:** Each story is grounded in a specific historical moment, giving children a window into history through a deeply engaging lens
- **Courage in unexpected places:** These animals show that bravery is not uniquely human—it can live in any creature whose nature drives it to act under pressure
- **Recognition and gratitude:** The book raises the question of how we honor those who served—including those who couldn't ask for recognition themselves

Tip for Parents: This book offers an emotionally accessible entry point into military history that works beautifully for military families and non-military families alike. The focus on animals makes the stories deeply engaging without dwelling on the violence or trauma of war. It's a wonderful book for building both historical knowledge and empathy—for the animals themselves and for the humans who served alongside them.

Discussion Questions

About the Animals and Their Service

- Which animal's story surprised you most? Why?
- What abilities did the animals have that made them useful to the military?
- How do you think the soldiers felt about the animals they worked with?
- What do you think it means to say an animal was "brave"?

About Service, Loyalty, and History

- Why do you think these stories are not as well known as the human stories from the same wars?
- What does it mean to "serve" something or someone? Can animals truly serve?
- How does learning about these animals change the way you think about military history?
- Do you think the animals understood what they were doing? Does it matter?

Fun Conversation Starters



Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com Phone: (407) 212-7759

- If you were in charge of a military, which animal would you most want on your team—and why?
 - If you could design a medal for one of the animals in the book, what would it look like?
 - What animal do you think has hidden talents humans haven't used yet?
 - Have you ever seen an animal do something that seemed almost unbelievably brave or loyal?
-

Discussion Activities

Learning More About Animal Service

- Research one animal from the book in more depth—what happened to them after the war?
- Look up real military working dogs today—what roles do they play in modern military service?
- Research Sergeant Reckless, Sergeant Reckless, Cher Ami, or another famous military animal
- Discuss: Are there formal honors given to military animals? Research awards like the Dickin Medal

Connecting to Military Families

- If you have family members who served, ask them what role animals played in their service experience
 - Visit a local veteran's memorial or museum and look for references to non-human service
 - Write a thank-you note to a military family in your community
 - Discuss: How does your family honor those who have served—human and animal?
-

Conversation Tips for Parents

Celebrating Animal Contributions

- Let your child lead: What animal story hit them hardest—and why? That's the place to start
- Validate emotional responses: it's completely appropriate to feel grief or admiration for animals who gave their lives in service
- Share what you know about military history through the lens of the animals—it often makes the history feel more vivid and real
- If your family has a pet, connect the discussion to what you've observed about your own animal's loyalty and responsiveness

Thinking About Service and Sacrifice

- Discuss what it means to serve something larger than yourself—not just in military terms, but in everyday life
 - Ask: "What's something you do that serves your family or community? What does it feel like?"
 - Talk about gratitude: How do we honor those whose service we benefit from but often don't see?
-

Questions by Age Group

For Younger Readers (Ages 6–8)

- Name one animal from the book and what it did in the military.
- What special ability did one of the animals have that helped soldiers?
- How do you think soldiers felt when working with these animals?
- What does the title "We Also Served" mean?



Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com Phone: (407) 212-7759

For Older Readers (Ages 9–12)

- Why do you think animals' military contributions have often been overlooked in history books?
 - What does the book suggest about the nature of courage—is it uniquely human?
 - How does the human-animal bond change under extreme conditions like war?
 - What does it mean to honor someone's service when they can't recognize or ask for that honor themselves?
-

Activity Ideas

Research and Writing Projects

- Choose one animal from the book and write a longer biography—their full story, from before service to after
- Research the Dickin Medal, awarded to military animals, and write about one recipient
- Create an illustrated "Hall of Fame" poster featuring three animals from the book with their key contributions
- Write a letter from a soldier to their animal companion, capturing what that partnership meant

History and Empathy Connections

- Research animals in a specific war (WWI, WWII, Vietnam) and what roles they played
 - Discuss: How do animals in service reflect the values of the humans who trained and deployed them?
 - Compare animal service across different countries—did other nations use similar animals in similar ways?
 - Create a timeline of animal service across military history
-

"We Also Served" is a reminder that the circle of those deserving our gratitude and recognition is wider than we usually draw it. The pigeons who flew through enemy fire, the dogs who warned of danger, the horses who carried soldiers across impossible terrain—they served alongside humans in the fullest sense of the word, and they did it without the ability to understand why or to ask for any recognition afterward. That combination of capability and wordless loyalty is one of the most moving things in the human-animal story. Let this book be an invitation to think more broadly about service, sacrifice, and who—and what—deserves to be remembered.