



Laggan Lard Butts

Eric Walters

Interest level: ages ten to fourteen

Reading level: 3.5

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AR Quiz # 106546

Book Summary

Sam Campbell's school team, the Laggan Lairds, always loses. When someone suggests that their name be the Laggan Lard Butts, Sam thinks the team should change its name. Sam wonders, what is a Laird, anyway? The basketball coach agrees, and soon the whole school is involved in an election for a new team name. Sam and his friends nominate the name Lard Butts. When the basketball team starts winning games after a warm-up cheer of "Go Lard Butts!" it seems the Lard Butt campaign might actually win the election.

Author Biography

Eric Walters is a best-selling author, teacher and social worker who also loves basketball. His many books for juveniles and young adults include these Orca titles: *Stuffed*, *Juice*, *Grind*, *Overdrive*, *Caged Eagles*, *War of the Eagles*, *the Basketball Series: Triple Threat*, *Underdog*, *Off Season*, *Full Court Press*, *Road Trip*, *Hoop Crazy!*, *Long Shot* and *Three on Three*.

Connecting to the Text

Language Arts—Advertising

In *Laggan Lard Butts*, Mr. Davidson’s class decides to create advertising campaigns for new names for the school’s team.

(p. 55) *“I was reading about advertising on the Internet last night. The secret to selling something is to get everybody talking about it...and the only way to get people to buy the name is for everybody to see and hear it everywhere.”*

As a class, engage in a similar exercise. Choose a name for your school’s team, or perhaps rename a local, regional or national sports team of the student’s choice.

1. Divide the class into small groups, with each group choosing a name and then putting together an advertising campaign to promote their name. Students may wish to create slogans, mottos, songs, cheers, posters, flyers or banners.
2. Once completed, students can present their advertisements to the class. If possible, invite students from another class to participate in a voting process, perhaps by applause or secret ballots.

Option: You may wish to collect an assortment of popular magazines, newspapers or television commercials to share with the class. As a group, brainstorm the methods that these advertisers use to “get everyone talking” about their products.

For example:

- A catchy tune
 - Beautiful locations, stylish lifestyle
 - Celebrity endorsement
 - Creating a demand
 - Emotional appeals
 - Hype and cross-promotion.
 - Peer pressure
 - Suggestions that one is inadequate without the product.
3. While deconstructing the advertisements, ask students to comment on whether the ads would work on them—would they buy these products because of the ads? Why, or why not?

Figure of Speech—Puns

Puns are a figure of speech that adds humor to our reading. In *Laggan Lard Butts*, much of the humor comes through puns.

(p. 25) *“It’s the name we’ve always used, and I’m an athletic supporter.”*

(p. 26) *“I kinda like the sound of that...The Laggan Bagpipes blow another game. That works.”*

1. Give a brief lecture on figures of speech using puns as an example. Encourage students to pick out puns as they read the novel and share them with the group.
2. Challenge students to write their own puns using a sports theme—or share popular jokes which use puns. Other examples of sports-themed puns could be:
 - Whether it’s a pancake or a baseball team, the secret is to start with a good batter.
 - I always wondered why the ball was getting bigger as it came at me...then it hit me!

Language Arts—Traditional and Historical Language

Sam and his class learn that Laird is a Scottish word meaning “lord of the manor, the owner of an estate.” Like many traditional languages, Scottish Gaelic, the ancient language of Scotland, is declining in usage now, with less than 60,000 speakers.

1. To build awareness of the Scottish Gaelic language, invite students to complete one of the following, either working alone or in pairs:
 - Research ten Scottish place names and translate each. Then find them on a map of Scotland. Do these cities and towns still use their traditional Scottish Gaelic name or has the name changed over time? For example, Glasgow / Glaschu.
 - Research five traditional Scottish names for girls and five for boys. What are their English translations or counterparts? For example, Catherine / Caitrìona and Donald / Dòmhnall. Can your name be translated into Scottish Gaelic?
 - How many letters are there in the Scottish Gaelic language? How are they pronounced?
 - Make a dictionary of twenty Scottish Gaelic words including the English translation for each.
 - Scotland has recently taken measures to preserve this language. Research how and why they are doing this.

Option: Many organizations across the world are working to preserve traditional languages through education, awareness building and policy. Are there traditional languages in decline in your state, province or country? Why did they decline? What is being done to preserve them?

Vocabulary Enrichment

1. The following words and terms are used in *Laggan Lard Butts* in the context of Sam's class election.

advertising	chair	name-calling	pros / cons	all in favor
conditions	opposed	rules	approved	count the votes
polling booth	secret ballot	ballot	democracy	private booths
threats	bribes	election	process	vote
campaign	mock election			

If your class decides to engage in a class election exercise, invite students to use these words in a letter or journal entry in which they describe the experience.

- If your class will not hold an election, invite students to write a letter or journal entry describing Sam's experience in *Laggan Lard Butts*.

Connecting to the Curriculum

History

1. Many national sports teams have interesting histories. Invite students to research the names of two professional sports teams (basketball, hockey, baseball, etc.). Where did these teams begin? What does their name mean? Was the name chosen to denote power, speed, agility or something else, such as local history?

Some basketball team examples could include:

- Boston Celtics. What are Celtics? How was this name chosen?
 - Charlotte Bobcats. What is special about a Bobcat?
 - Denver Nuggets. What kind of nuggets does this name allude to? What is the connection to Denver?
 - New York Knickerbockers (Knicks). What is a Knickerbocker? How was this name chosen?
 - Philadelphia 76ers. What happened in Philadelphia in 1776?
2. Basketball began in 1891 in Massachusetts when Canadian Dr. James Naismith was looking for a game for children that could be played indoors during the long winter months. Ask students to write a short report on Dr. James Naismith's game. What did he use for a ball and baskets? What were his thirteen rules? What was the size of the court? How is Dr. James Naismith's game different from the basketball that is played today?

Drama

1. Ask students to work in small groups and improvise skits based on key scenes from *Laggan Lard Butts*. Have students improvise their own scenarios or choose from

the examples below. Students should draw from *Laggan Lard Butts* while preparing their skits. Ask students to present their skits to the class.

- Imagine that Mr. McGregor, Sarah, Sam, Tanner and Taylor are debating the name Laggan Lard Butts. Mr. McGregor and Sarah don't want the name Laggan Lard Butts to win. Why? In terms of the school's team name, what is Mr. McGregor's responsibility—to the students, the school, the parents and the community? Sam, Tanner and Taylor are keen to get votes for the name Laggan Lard Butts. How can they convince Mr. McGregor that it's a good name for the school team?
- Sam and Sarah used to date but since they broke up a few weeks ago, they just get on each other's nerves. Sam now angers and frustrates Sarah, and Sam thinks she's the "number one teacher suck-up of all time" (p. 20). Imagine Sam and Sarah are still together as a couple but are just about to break up. What do you think caused the break up? Was the break up amicable? How do you know?
- Mr. Davidson says that, "it's not whether you win or lose, it's how you play the game"(p.12) but Sam is not convinced. He wants to win. Imagine that Mr. Davidson and Sam are having a debate on this topic. What examples from life experience or history can they use to back up their opinions?

Physical Education

Ask students to imagine that Sam must teach a visiting foreign exchange student how to play basketball. His visiting friend has never played before and wants to learn. The friend has asked for a booklet and poster to take with him when he returns to his home country. Create a "how to" booklet and a poster of a basketball court. Ensure that the "how to" book includes information on:

- Number of players and the positions
- Scoring and timing of the game
- Rules for handling the ball, skills required
- Layout of the court with definitions
- Penalties
- Sportsmanship.

Government and Citizenship

In *Laggan Lard Butts*, Sam's class learns about the democratic process and puts it into action by holding an election to determine a new name for their school team.

(p. 94) *"We are here today to practice something very important: democracy. One student, one vote, all of us equal, will decide...Your right to vote comes with a responsibility. You must choose wisely. Do not waste your vote."*

Ask students to choose one of the following options and either write a short report or prepare a visual presentation.

1. Sam's class learns that women got the vote in New Zealand in 1893, and in America in Wyoming in 1869. Research the history of the vote in your country, state or province. Make a timeline with the dates that particular groups were given the vote, such as women, non-whites, prisoners, Aboriginal people, etc. Include on the timeline other important events in history such as the American Civil War, WWI, WWII, etc.
2. Write a report on someone who was influential in getting the vote for disenfranchised groups. Examples include Susan B. Anthony in the United States, Nellie McClung in Canada or Emmeline Parnkhurst in Britain. Where were they from? Why did they get involved? What were some of the challenges they faced?
3. Research the democratic process in your country, state or province. What is the legal age for voting? When and where is voting held? How do people register to vote? How are the votes counted? Prepare a presentation for your class that teaches about voting where you live. Use the model of a public service announcement television commercial.
4. There are different kinds of democracies, including direct democracy and representative democracy. What's the difference between them?
5. Many countries in the world do not have a democratic government. Research one of these countries. By what system is their country governed? How does this affect the citizens? Imagine that you are a youth living in this country. How is your life different than a youth who lives in a democratic country?

Democracy in Action

Put the democratic process into action in your class. Ideally, students should vote on something that is meaningful to them, such as choosing the destination for the next fieldtrip. You may wish to divide the class in half, with one half acting as voting members and one half participating in the campaigning exercise.

1. As a group, brainstorm ideas for the steps involved in engaging in the democratic process in your class, as Sam and his friends did in *Laggan Lard Butts*. Have one or two students record the ideas on the board or a flipchart. Then, as a class, organize the steps into a logical series.
Prompts for brainstorming might include:
 - What will you be voting on? (a new name for your school team, where to go on the next field trip, etc.) How will the candidates be nominated?

- Do you need to get permission to engage in the process?
 - How will you establish your “rules and conditions” for nominations? (nominating and seconding, someone to oversee the process)
 - What is the timeline?
 - What will the rules be for campaigning? (no name-calling, no negative ads, canvassing rules, media to use, etc.)
 - How will the campaign offices be organized? (one option is to have one person in charge—a campaign manager—with others to take on specific tasks, such as artists, communicators, canvassers and ethics specialists)
 - Where will the election take place? How can you be sure it will be fair? (secret ballots, polling booths, campaigning, etc.) Who will count the votes?
2. Once the students have completed the nomination portion of the exercise, small groups can be created as “campaign offices.” Ask these groups to compile campaign plans that outline their motivation and strategies. Their plans should include:
 - Their rationale for what they have chosen to support (why did they choose this name, this location for the fieldtrip, etc.);
 - Their proposed methods (cheers, announcements, flyers, posters, etc.)
 - Their timeline (when will they be campaigning?)
 3. Proceed with the election campaign and voting.

Option: You may wish to invite a local politician (Mayor, Council Member or School Board Representative) into the class to share some of their experiences about the democratic process. If possible, allow time for students to ask questions or share their campaign plans and get feedback from the visitor.

Connecting to the Students—Ideas and Discussion Topics

1. Sam wants to change the name of his school’s team. He believes that the tradition of using their current name, the Laggan Lairds, has been lost over time and holds little meaning for the students.

(p. 33) *Tradition? Isn’t that just another way of looking at the past instead of thinking about the future...Sometimes it’s just saying we won’t change because that’s the way we have always done things.*
- Engage in a group discussion about traditions and their positive and negative aspects. Why are traditions meaningful to us? How does something—an event,

a song, a way of dressing, a routine—become a tradition? Reflect on some of the traditions in your school. How did they become traditions? Are they as meaningful now as they were when they began? Would it be difficult to change them now? Why?

- Discuss traditions with a more universal scope. Think of examples from around the world or from the history of your state or province. Are these traditions difficult to change? Why?
2. Sam is a competitive basketball player although he is often unhappy and discouraged because his team always loses. He says, “That game had been a heartbreaker. It was better to lose by a lot than by a little” (p. 13). Why does Sam say this? Do you sometimes feel this way when you’re playing sports? Why?
 3. Mr. Davidson says that the Laggan Lairds “do really well...relative to the size of our school. We’re so much smaller than every other school in the league” (p. 14). The Lairds have a lot of disadvantages compared to other school teams like the Maple Ridge Mustangs. Make a list of these disadvantages—remote location, small student population, farming community, etc. Could Sam’s school do things differently to increase their chances of winning? What are some options they could try?
 4. Sometimes the underdog can capture the hearts of fans even if they don’t always win games. Think of examples of sports teams or athletes who were true underdogs. Why were the fans so enamored with them? A real life example could be the Jamaican Bobsled Team at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, Canada, and an example from popular culture could be Daniel LaRusso in the movie *The Karate Kid*. You may wish to show the movies *Cool Runnings* or *The Karate Kid* as a lead-in to a discussion on underdogs in sports.
 5. Sometimes school elections can become popularity contests where the issues are overlooked and the popularity of the delegates become more important. Has this happened in your school? If yes, brainstorm practical ways to make student elections more about issues and less about who is popular. If no, what does your school do to avoid this?

Web Resources

www.media-awareness.ca/english/teachers/index.cfm

Media Awareness Network website, “For Teachers” section. Has a “lesson library” with resources on teaching media awareness, ad deconstruction, marketing to kids, etc.

<http://pbskids.org/democracy/educators/index.html>

PBS Public Broadcasting “PBS Kids—The Democracy Project” website. Includes classroom activities on voting, elections and government. See section “What a Difference One Vote Makes” for a timeline with some examples of close elections in American history, and “Step into a Voting Time Machine” for history of voting rights in America. Site contains excellent educator’s resources section.

www.badpuns.com/

Bad Puns website. Contains extensive list of puns and definitions. A royalty-free and ‘family friendly’ website.

www.nba.com/analysis/rules_index.html

Official website of the National Basketball Association of America. Includes the rules of play and conduct.

www.kansasheritage.org/people/naismith.html

Kansas Heritage website. Includes an article on Dr. James Naismith, the inventor of basketball.