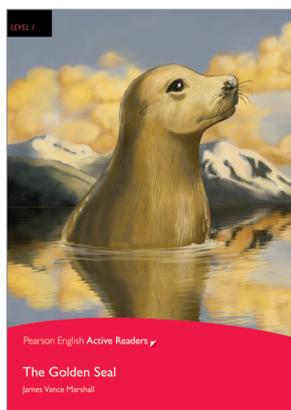


# The Golden Seal

James Vance Marshall



## About the author

James Vance Marshall was born Donald G. Payne in London in 1924. His other pen names include Ian Cameron and Donald Gordon. He has written eleven novels and nine works of non-fiction. Some of his work has been adapted into films for the big screen. These include *Walkabout* (1971), the Disney production *The Island at the Top of the World* (1974) and *The Golden Seal* (1983), which was based on the novel *A river ran out of Eden* (1962). He lives in Surrey, England and has four sons and one daughter.

## Summary

A young boy, Eric, gets caught away from home during a storm and makes friends with a golden seal and her pups. He is worried though, because his father, Jim, has always wanted to shoot a golden seal for its fur. During the storm, a seal catcher, Crawford, has also turned up at Eric's house and has offered to help Eric's mother and father to look for their son. When they find him, Crawford suspects that Eric knows where to find the golden seal. Eric then asks his father to promise not to kill the seal and they go together to see her. Suddenly a dangerous bear appears and Jim takes Eric down to the beach where it cannot smell them. Eventually, the bear goes away toward Eric's house, but his mother, Tania, frightens it away by shooting a gun. Later that night, Crawford persuades Eric to show him the golden seal the following day. During the night, however, Crawford becomes impatient and he goes to find the seal alone. Suddenly he is attacked by the bear and in the fight, both of them die. Eric's family is safe and happy and the seal and her pups swim away.

**Chapter 1:** Jim lives with his wife, Tania, and his eight-year-old son, Eric, on the Aleutian island of Unimak, near Alaska. One night, Jim arrives home and announces that there is going to be a big storm. Tania is afraid and doesn't sleep all night. The following morning, Jim and Tania go to the river to look for salmon, but Eric doesn't want to go. He promises his parents that he will stay near the house. Later that day, the storm begins and Jim and Tania run home. There, they find a letter from Eric saying that he has gone to the sand dunes to look for a golden seal. Jim tries to go and look for Eric, but the wind is so strong that he falls down in the sand. Tania manages to carry him back home. Later that night they hear a noise outside the house. Jim opens the door and a man with his face covered in blood falls into the house.

**Chapter 2:** That morning, instead of staying near to home as he had promised, Eric went to the sand dunes in search of a golden seal. Suddenly, the storm began and Eric was frightened. Realizing he could not get home, he decided to go to one of the small buildings on the sand dunes where his father keeps food, lights, and coats. He managed to get there and went in. It was dark and there was a strong smell. Then he heard a noise and saw two little red lights. There was an animal there too and he was afraid. Eric found a light and discovered that the animal was a beautiful golden seal with two small pups. Now Eric wasn't afraid and he gave some salmon to the seal. He put a coat over the animals to keep them warm. Eric slept with his head on the seal's back. The next morning, Eric thinks about his father, Jim, who always has a gun and wants to kill a golden seal for its fur. Eric is worried and decides he must speak to his father before his father sees the seal.

**Chapter 3:** Before the storm began, a man called Crawford saw the golden seal and realized she was going to have pups. He chased her in his boat in order to kill her for her fur, but the storm began and he fell into the water. He managed to get to the beach and saw a small house. With difficulty he got to the door and when it opened, he fell to the ground. The house belonged to Jim and Tania and Jim knew the man was a seal catcher. The following morning, Crawford opens his eyes and sees Jim and Tania with their coats on. They explain that they are going to find their son Eric and Crawford offers to help. They set off on their search and arrive at a river. They can see Eric on the other side. Crawford offers to swim

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across the river to get Eric. When he reaches the other side, Eric explains to him that he has had an interesting time in the storm. Crawford asks Eric what happened, but he says it's a secret. Crawford takes Eric back across the river and they go back to the house. Eric asks his father to make a promise and then tells him about the seal. Jim is worried because he has always wanted to catch a golden seal and tells Eric that she isn't a friendly animal. He also tells Eric not to say anything to Crawford.

**Chapter 4:** Jim and Eric go back to the building in the sand dunes because they want to find the seal before Crawford does, but the seal is no longer there. They continue to look for her and eventually find her in a water hole in the sand dunes. Eric takes some salmon and feeds the seal. Jim thinks about shooting her for her fur, but then he remembers his promise to his son and realizes he could never do it. Then a bear appears from behind the sand dune and Jim slowly takes Eric away from the dune and towards the beach. The bear is old and can't see them and now with the smell of the ocean, he can no longer smell them either. He moves away from them angrily. Suddenly they hear the noise of a gun and think about Tania. They run home and find Tania with a gun in her hand. She had frightened the bear away by shooting the gun. Later that evening Eric sees Crawford approaching the house.

**Chapter 5:** Crawford returns to the house angry because he hasn't been able to find the seal. He sits down with Eric and asks him about his secret. He tricks Eric into telling him about the seal and then promises not to shoot the seal if Eric will take him to see her. Eric says that the seal is in a secret place in the dunes and that he will take Crawford the next day.

**Chapter 6:** During the night, Crawford takes Jim's gun and goes in search of the seal. He arrives at the water and sees the seal and her pups. Suddenly there is a noise behind him and Crawford turns around and sees the bear. He shoots the bear and the bear attacks him. Both of them fall to the ground dead. The next morning, Jim, Tania, and Eric find Crawford and the bear. Eric looks for the seal in the water but she isn't there. He asks his father if Crawford has shot her but then they see some golden fur down on the beach. They watch as the seal and her two pups move towards the ocean and swim away. Tania asks Jim if he is unhappy because he hasn't caught the seal,

and he tells her that money is not important when you have a happy family. Jim asks Eric if he is unhappy because he has lost his friend, and Eric says he isn't because she has her home in the ocean where she belongs.

### Background and themes

**Nature:** Unimak is an undeveloped, unspoiled island with only a very small population. The inhabitants must hunt and fish to survive and live alongside animals like seals and bears. Throughout the story, Eric realizes that different species must live differently and he comes to accept that the seal cannot be his friend.

**Money versus happiness:** Both Crawford and Jim are motivated to kill the golden seal for money, but Jim realizes in the end that his promise to his son and the happiness of his family is more important than money. Ruthless Crawford ends up dead in his search for money.

### Discussion activities

#### Chapter 1

##### Before reading

- Game:** Play a game of twenty questions with animals. Tell the students you are thinking of an animal and they have to ask you 20 questions that have a "yes", "no", or "sometimes" answer in order to guess that animal. Write a few example questions on the board to start them off (see Discussion activities key). After 20 questions, students must guess the animal. If they get it right, they win. If they get it wrong, you win. Now put students in small groups to play again.

##### While reading (p. 1, after "... but they didn't see one.")

- Pair work:** Ask students about the family in the story e.g., *What's the mother's / father's / son's name?* Now brainstorm the words in English for other members of the family and write them on the board (see Discussion activities key). Now ask student to write down the proper names of five members of their family. Put students in pairs to talk about each of the people with their partner. Give an example yourself first e.g., *Peter is my brother. He is 48 years old. He lives in London. He is an artist. He likes music and animals.*

##### After reading

- Discuss:** Write the following on the board: *Jim, Tania, and Eric are a happy family, but Tania is frightened of the storm.* Now put students in small groups to discuss the following questions: *When are people often happy? When are people often frightened?* Get feedback from the whole class to see which group comes up with the most ideas.

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### Chapter 2

**While reading** (page 10, after "... she opened her mouth and started to eat.")

- 4 Pair work:** Put students in pairs and tell them they have two minutes to write down as many food names as possible in English. Stop them after two minutes and find out which pair has the most words. Elicit them and write them on the board and then ask other pairs to add more. Now ask students to discuss the following questions in pairs: *What food do you like? What food do you hate? What do you usually eat for breakfast / lunch / dinner?* Go around the class helping them with any difficult vocabulary.

### After reading

- 5 Guess:** Ask students to discuss in pairs what they think Eric is going to say to his father and how he is going to persuade him not to shoot the seal. Get them to write down their ideas and then get feedback from the whole class.

### Chapter 3

**While reading** (p. 16, after "Jim and Tania sat down and talked quietly about their son.")

- 6 Write and pair work:** Put students in pairs to write a mini-dialogue between Jim and Tania about Eric. Give them more context if you feel it's necessary (see Discussion activities key). When they've finished, get them to practice it and then get a few of the more confident students to act it out for the rest of the class.

### After reading

- 7 Discuss and write:** Remind students that Eric thinks the golden seal is his friend but his father doesn't. Now put them in groups to discuss what makes a good friend. Get somebody to take notes and then get feedback from the different groups, writing ideas on the board. Now ask students to write one or two paragraphs with the title *My Good Friend* about somebody they think is a good friend to them. Tell them to describe the person and explain why this person is a good friend.
- 8 Write and ask:** Write *Why did Crawford fall into the water?* on the board and elicit the answer (Because there was a strong wind). Ask students to write another question about something from Chapter 3. Check their work as they do this. Now have students walk around the classroom, asking and answering each other's questions.

### Chapter 4

**While reading** (p. 27, after, "The bear didn't see them. But he managed to hear and smell them.")

- 9 Pair work:** Explain to the students that although the bear cannot see, it uses its other senses of hearing and smell to find out what is going on. Ask students to make a list of all the things they hear and smell on

a normal day. Get feedback from the class and then ask them to discuss what things they would find difficult to do if they couldn't see and how their other senses might help.

### After reading

- 10 Discuss and write:** Tell students to imagine they are Eric, who wants to write a letter to a cousin who lives in Alaska about what has been happening, how he feels now and what he thinks is going to happen. Let them discuss what to include in small groups and then ask students to write the letter individually.

### Chapter 5

#### After reading

- 11 Write and guess:** Write *Crawford found the golden seal.* on the board. Elicit from the students what is wrong with this sentence (he didn't find it). Now tell the students to choose one sentence from Chapter 5 and write it again changing one of the words. Students then walk around the classroom, reading out their sentences to other students who must listen and spot the mistake.
- 12 Discuss:** Put students in small groups and ask them to discuss the following questions. Encourage them to give reasons for their answers and then get feedback from the whole class: *Is Crawford a good man? Is he going to shoot the seal? Is Eric a good boy? Is the seal his friend? What animals are often friends of people? What animals do people often shoot?*

### Chapter 6

#### After reading

- 13 Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *noise, rabbit, shot, knife, blood.* In pairs, students make sentences including these words to reflect how they were important in Chapter 6, without looking back at the book. Get feedback from the whole class.
- 14 Write and discuss:** Remind students that Jim says that family, not money, is important to him at the end. Ask students to write a list of ten people or things that are important to them. Now put them in small groups to compare which things they have in common on their lists. Get feedback from the whole class to see if there are some things they all have in common.
- 15 Write and pair work:** Put students in pairs and tell one student from each pair to look at Chapters 1–3 and the other to look at Chapters 4–6. Ask them to choose five illustrations from the allocated chapters and to write one or two sentences to describe each of the illustrations. When they have finished, get them to swap papers with their partner. Give them 5 minutes to look through the chapters allocated to their partner in order to match an illustration with a description, writing page number (and top or bottom where relevant) next to the sentence(s). The students then check with their partners to see if they were right.