

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussion groups or library programs.

Meet Ohio-born author Susan Orlean and learn about her books.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading and sharing *Rin Tin Tin*.

Discover additional books, films, and websites to explore topics and themes in depth.

Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend

By Susan Orlean

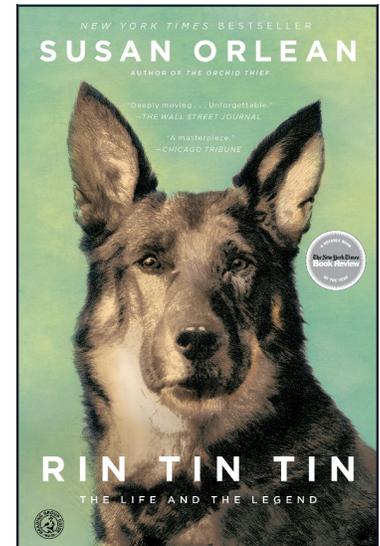


About the Book

The seeds for *Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend* were planted, in Susan Orlean's childhood, by the Rin Tin Tin figurine on her grandfather's desk and the 1950's TV series *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin*. Years later when she learned that Rin Tin Tin was a real dog with an amazing life, she was drawn into his story.

Rin Tin Tin was a puppy found by Lee Duncan, a young American soldier, on a battlefield in France during World War I. Lee adopted Rinty and took him home to California where he drew the attention of Warner Bros. During the following ten years he starred in twenty-three blockbusting films that saved the studio from bankruptcy. Through the years Rinty and his descendants transitioned from silent films to talkies, from black and white to color, from radio to television.

The story that began on a battlefield expanded into an enduring bond between humans and animals. It is also a history of twentieth-century entertainment and entrepreneurship. Over its ninety-year timespan, *Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend* explores the shift in status of dogs from working farmhands to beloved family members, the rise of Hollywood, and the past and present of dogs in war.



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Book Details

Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend by Susan Orlean.

Simon & Schuster, 2011, ISBN 9781439190135.

<http://books.simonandschuster.com/Rin-Tin-Tin/Susan-Orlean/9781439190142>

Other formats include audiobook and ebook.

Available through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program:

<http://www.klas.com/talkingbooks/ohio>.



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About the Author

Susan Orlean has been a staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 1992. She is the author of seven books, including *Rin Tin Tin*, *Saturday Night*, and *The Orchid Thief*, which was made into the Academy Award-winning film *Adaptation*. *Rin Tin Tin* was the winner of the 2012 Ohioana Book Award for Nonfiction. Susan Orlean lives with her family and her animals in upstate New York.

Author Resources

Susan Orlean's Official Website

<http://www.susanorlean.com/>

Author Page on Simon & Schuster Website

<http://authors.simonandschuster.com/Susan-Orlean/23066751>

Susan Orlean's Contributor Page on *The New Yorker* Website

<http://www.newyorker.com/contributors/susan-orlean>

"Rin Tin Tin: A Silent Film Star On Four Legs" (*Fresh Air* Interview with Susan Orlean)

<http://www.npr.org/2012/11/02/164131783/rin-tin-tin-a-silent-film-star-on-four-legs>

Author Magazine Video Interview with Susan Orlean

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYJQ94jak1o>

Ohio Center for the Book Profile of Susan Orlean

<http://www.ohiocenterforthebook.org/OhioAuthors/OrleanSusan.aspx>

Susan Orlean Talks with Steven Colbert about Rin Tin Tin on *The Colbert Report*

<http://thecolbertreport.cc.com/videos/y88hzi/susan-orlean>

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Contact Susan Orlean at susan@susanorlean.com.

"Rin Tin Tin's life turned out to be extraordinary, not just because things went his way but because so often they came close to going the other way."

Go Further

*Ideas for extending the experience of reading **Rin Tin Tin**.*

Search for "Rin Tin Tin" on YouTube or other online video service to find some Rin Tin Tin clips, and watch the videos with your book group, family, or friends. You can also check your local library for copies of Rinty's films. For a list of Ohio public libraries, see Find A Library: <http://www.oplin.org/content/find-a-library>. Orlean writes, "It may seem absurd to claim that Rin Tin Tin was a good actor, but after you see this scene, it's hard to deny." (p. 83) Does watching clips change your opinion of Rin Tin Tin's

acting abilities? Are you more, or less convinced?

Rin Tin Tin's first rush of success in silent films came from his ability to evoke emotion without speaking. Play a game of emotion charades (charades using different emotions as the clues) with your book group, family, or friends, to give yourselves a taste of silent acting. Do you have a greater appreciation for Rin Tin Tin after having tried to emote silently yourself? Do you think you'd be able to hold your own in a scene with the original Rinty?

Talk About It

Topics to share when discussing *Rin Tin Tin*.

Were you familiar with Rin Tin Tin before reading this book? What memories do you have of the famous dog? What was it like to delve back into the history of Rin Tin Tin? If this was your first introduction to him, what impressions did the book give you?

Lee and the first Rin Tin Tin shared an incredibly close bond. Do you think Lee's devotion to Rinty was more of an endearing character trait, or a symptom of deeper personal issues? Consider the many people who felt wronged or resentful toward Lee—his daughter Carolyn, his wife Charlotte, and his wife Eva, in your answer.

Lee steadfastly believed that Rinty was destined for greatness and, as Orlean writes, "he was lucky to be his human guide and companion." (p. 34) Do you think Lee underestimated, or misunderstood, his importance in creating the Rin Tin Tin juggernaut?

Orlean writes that Rin Tin Tin, alive on the screen, "was everything Americans wanted to think they were—brave, enterprising, bold, and most of all, individual." (p. 89) How much of Rin Tin Tin's emotional depth do you think came from viewers projecting their own feelings on him?

Orlean writes, "As his fame grew, Rin Tin Tin became, in a way, less particular—less specifically this one single dog—and more conceptual, the archetypal dog hero." (p. 97) In what ways did Rin Tin Tin shift from a literal representation to a symbolic figure? What specific moments, if any, highlight this shift?

How did the evolution of the film and television industries dictate the various reincarnations of Rin Tin Tin? Why was Rin Tin Tin—the dog and the archetype—so wildly successful, both in films and later in television?

Bert takes over as the protagonist of the book after Lee dies. How do you feel about the way the narrative continues after Lee's death?

What do you think Lee and Bert would have thought of this book?

Orlean wonders, of the many different iterations of Rin Tin Tin, "Could that wide, wide range of manifestations really belong to anyone?" (p. 297) What do you think? If yes, who owns which parts of the legacy—legally, sentimentally, practically? Do you think Orlean herself now owns a part of the legacy, too?

Orlean delves into many historical events and movements in the book—dogs in the military, obedience training, movie and television history—to name a few. Which facts surprised you the most?

Discussion questions courtesy Simon & Schuster, from *Rin Tin Tin Reading Group Guide*, <http://books.simonandschuster.com/Rin-Tin-Tin/Susan-Orlean/9781439190142>. Used with permission. Find more discussion questions, and a Q&A with Susan Orlean, in this reading guide, which is also included in the paperback edition of *Rin Tin Tin*.

Go Further (continued)

Rin Tin Tin as a dog provided unending loyalty and devotion to Lee, and Rin Tin Tin as a canine ideal inspired millions of viewers with his heroism and strength. Explore the relationship between humans and dogs with your book group, family, or friends. If people in your group have dogs, bring them to your gathering (maybe go for a walk together!), and share your experiences. Why did you get a dog? What traits do you most love in your pet? What was

obedience training like? If no one has a dog, or if you're feeling adventurous, contact a local dog shelter and inquire about volunteer walking. Do you feel that you understand Lee a bit better after spending time with his favorite companions?

Enhancement activities courtesy of Simon & Schuster, from *Rin Tin Tin Reading Group Guide*, <http://books.simonandschuster.com/Rin-Tin-Tin/Susan-Orlean/9781439190142>. Used with permission.

Check It Out

Companion books and films for **Rin Tin Tin**.

Watch Rin Tin Tin features, serials, and television episodes. Various video clips are available online, and some libraries may have DVD collections such as **The Legend of Rin Tin Tin**, a compilation of serials, and **Rin Tin Tin Collection: Volume 1**, a compilation of feature films and serials.

Read **Warner Bros.: Hollywood's Ultimate Backlot** by Steven Bingen (ISBN 9781589799615). Bingen takes readers inside the most famous and most mysterious of the great American movie studios. He covers both the origins and rise of Warner Bros. and the moviemaking process.

Watch **You Must Remember This: The Warner Bros. Story** (2008). Narrator Clint Eastwood guides viewers through the history of one of the greatest motion picture studios, from the days when Rin Tin Tin was its biggest star, through the Depression and war, the golden age of Hollywood, and onward to the 21st century. A companion book, **You Must Remember This** by Richard Schickel, is also available (ISBN 978-0762434183).
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1230441>

Read **You Must Remember This: Life and Style in Hollywood's Golden Age** by Robert J. Wagner with Scott Eyman (ISBN 9780670026098), a personal reminiscence by Wagner about the American movie industry in the 1930s-1950s. Ask at your local library for other books about Hollywood and the history of film and television.

Read **Animal Stars : Behind the Scenes with Your Favorite Animal Actors** by Robin Ganzer, PhD and Allen and Linda Anderson ; foreword by Marty Becker, DVM. (ISBN 9781608682638). This book collects behind-the-scenes stories of animals who played central roles in major films and their relationships with animal trainers, actors, and directors.

Read **Unlikely Friendships: 47 Remarkable Stories from the Animal Kingdom** (ISBN 9780761159131) and its companion books **Unlikely Loves** (ISBN 9780761174424) and **Unlikely Heroes** (ISBN 9780761174417). These compilations of animal stories by *National Geographic* contributing writer Jennifer S. Holland are appropriate for all ages.

Explore More

Additional ideas and resources to use with **Rin Tin Tin**.

Rin Tin Tin: From Battlefield To Hollywood, A Story Of Friendship

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/monkeysee/2011/09/24/140746523/>

From NPR's Weekend Edition, writer Linda Holmes shares the story of how Rin Tin Tin became one of the most celebrated animals in film history.

Search for Animal Welfare Groups

<https://www.petfinder.com/animal-shelters-and-rescues/search>

Thinking about adopting a dog? The Petfinder website offers a search of animal shelters and animal welfare groups in Ohio and nationwide. Search by Zip code, city and state, or group name.

Dog Walkers: Volunteer to Walk Dogs at Animal Shelters

<http://volunteerguide.org/volunteer/fewhours/dog-walkers.htm>

Volunteer dog walkers provide the daily exercise, affection and socialization that confined dogs need to stay healthy, happy and adoptable.

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits:
<http://library.ohio.gov/ctro>.

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