

Classroom Guide

A Home for Dakota

written by Jan Zita Grover and illustrated by Nancy Lane
published by The Gryphon Press (Sit! Stay! Read! Series), 2008.

A note to the teacher: This book can be used in a variety of ways for both older and younger readers.

Themes:

- ◆ Dogs, Dogs, Dogs
- ◆ Puppy Mills (puppy farms)
- ◆ Helping Kids with Cancer
- ◆ Teaching Ethics to Children

About the book

When the puppy Dakota was rescued from a puppy mill, she was scared, sick, and unable to take care of herself. When the little girl, Sweetie lost her hair due to cancer she was also afraid and angry at the world. This is a story about a dog helping a girl find peace. This is a story about about a girl helping a puppy find a home. This is a story about learning to trust, and the joy that comes in having a friend.

A Home for Dakota is a reminder that it is never too late and that together we can make a difference ... whether it's closing a puppy mill or giving a child, and a puppy, hope.

Awards

The Human Society of the United States Youth Award for Best Picture Book of the Year, 2009

ASPCA's Henry Bergh Award in Fiction, Companion Animals (Honor Book), 2009

About the Author

Jan Zita Grover has worked in canine rescue for over 30 years, especially with discarded puppy mill breed dogs. She is the author of two nonfiction titles for adults. This is her first picture book.

About the Illustrator

Nancy Lane (www.nancylanestudio.com) has illustrated over 20 books for children, including *Rembrandt and the Boy who drew Dogs* (Barron's, 2008) and *Finding Chance* (Mondo Publishing, 2007). Her detailed illustrations bring her animal characters to life.

Things to think about before you read the book

- ◆ How do you feel animals should be treated?
- ◆ How are pet animals different from wild animals?
- ◆ Do you have a dog in your family?
- ◆ What other people do you know who have dogs?
- ◆ Who takes care of him/her?
- ◆ Have you ever visited an animal shelter?
- ◆ Have you ever felt scared or alone?

Things to think about while you read the book

- ◆ How do you think Dakota felt living in a puppy mill? Living with Emma? Meeting Sweetie?
- ◆ How do you think Sweetie feels about having cancer?

Things to think about after you read the book

- ◆ How did Sweetie and Dakota help each other?
- ◆ Have you ever had a pet or animal help you? In what ways can animals or pets help people?
- ◆ Have you ever helped a pet or animal?
- ◆ What have you learned from the book *A Home for Dakota*?
- ◆ Has reading *A Home for Dakota* inspired you to do something to help dogs or other animals? If so, what have you been inspired to do?

Dog, Dogs Dogs

A FEW FACTS ABOUT DOGS

- ◆ Dogs descended from wolves and began looking like they do today about 13,000 years ago.
- ◆ Wolves descended from a small, weasel-like, tree-dwelling mammal called *Miacis* about 40 million years ago (See Figure 1.).
- ◆ Sight: Dogs can see better in dim light than humans can, but they are considered color blind.
- ◆ Smell: Dogs can smell better than humans can; some say their sense of smell is 1 million times better than ours.
- ◆ Sound: Dogs can hear a sound 250 yards away (most people can't hear beyond 25 yards).
- ◆ Movement: Compared to the bone structure of the human foot, dogs technically walk on their toes.

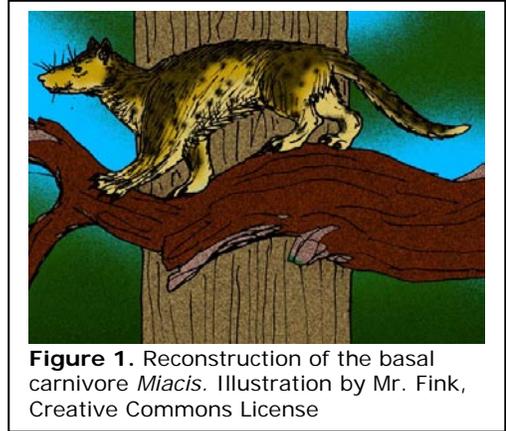


Figure 1. Reconstruction of the basal carnivore *Miacis*. Illustration by Mr. Fink, Creative Commons License

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Make a class list of all the interesting dog facts students think of, find in books, or find on the Internet. Give them a time limit. (Students can work in groups or alone.)

SO YOU WANT TO GET A DOG?

Getting a dog is a major decision. Often children are so excited about the THOUGHT of getting a dog or are entranced with how cute a puppy can be. Children don't consider the extent of the responsibility that comes with having a dog. To make matters worse, pets are intentionally put in store front windows to encourage "impulse buying." (Be careful when buying a dog from a pet store. Many of those dogs come from puppy mills.)

Use the following questions to begin a discussion about getting a dog. This is also a good lead-in to discussing responsibility on a larger scale.

- ◆ What does it mean to be responsible? Discuss how having a responsibility means an ongoing commitment.
- ◆ What kinds of responsibilities to you have?

- ◆ Why do you want a dog? *Remember, when you adopt a pet, you are making a commitment to care for the animal for his or her lifetime. It's not like a toy or video game that you can put away and forget about when you get tired of it. You are responsible for a dog every single day.*
- ◆ Whose job is it to take care of a dog?
- ◆ Make a list of all the tasks that are a part of taking care of a dog. (Read *Are You Ready for Me?* by Claire Buchwald.)
- ◆ Does your family have time for a dog? Are you gone a lot? *Dogs need a lot of attention and if you are never home, perhaps getting a dog is not a good idea for your family.*
- ◆ Can you afford a dog? *Licenses, training classes, spaying and neutering, veterinary care, grooming, toys, food, kitty litter, and other expenses add up quickly.*
- ◆ Can you have a pet where you live? *Some neighborhoods and apartment buildings have strict rules about having pets.*

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Have your students imagine they are dogs. What qualities would they want in their human? Have record those qualities in a “shopping list.” For example:

NICE DOG LOOKING FOR A HUMAN TO TAKE CARE OF. HUMAN MUST ...

1. Be caring
2. Feed me every day
3. Take me for walks
4. Scratch behind my ears
5. Let me sleep in their bed (or under it)

Share lists with the rest of the class or post them around the room. Students can illustrate their lists if they choose.

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

1. Make a brochure or flyer with the things to think about before you get a dog and what you need to do after you get a dog. Give it a title that explains what it's about, like, “Be Smart about Dogs Day!” Use photos of real dogs or illustrations from the students in the class.
2. Select a student to present the information about the flyer during the morning announcements or as a part of an assembly. Explain where the flyers are available. Arrange to have an animal shelter bring a few puppies or dogs to school as a part of “Be Smart about Dogs Day!” Hand the flyers out to everyone that visits.

DOGS THAT HELP

Dakota was a very special dog. Her life started out very badly, but when she was rescued, her life changed. After she was shown love and care, she was able to help Sweetie's life get better, too.

There are many other dogs that have made a difference in the lives of humans. Here is just a partial list of some of the more famous ones...

- ◆ Buddy (German Shepherd) - the first formally trained guide dog in the United States.
- ◆ Lucky and Flo (Black Labrador Retrievers) - the first animals trained to detect optical discs by scent (sponsored by the MPAA and FACT)
- ◆ Rajah (German Shepherd) - the first Police dog to serve in New Zealand
- ◆ Approximately 350 search and rescue dogs worked at the World Trade Center site following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Rescuers relied on the dogs' sense of smell and agility in tight spaces to seek survivors and recover the remains of victims.

PUT A LINE BETWEEN THE FAMOUS DOG AND ITS BREED

(Answer Key Follows)

Frank from the <i>Men in Black</i> movies	Jack Russel Terrier
Toto from the movie <i>The Wizard of Oz</i>	mixed breed
Beethoven from the movie <i>Beethoven</i>	Dalmatian
Fang from the <i>Harry Potter</i> movies	Great Dane
Eddie from the TV show <i>Frasier</i>	Newfoundland
Nana from the book <i>Peter Pan</i> by J. M. Barrie	Beagle
Clifford from the book and TV show <i>Clifford, The Big Red Dog</i> by Norman Bridwell	Golden Retriever
Winn-Dixie from the book and movie <i>Because of Winn-Dixie</i> by Kate DiCamillo	Saint Bernard
Buddy from the the Air Bud movies	Cairn Terrier
Tramp from the Walt Disney movie <i>Lady and the Tramp</i>	Vizsla

Pongo from the Walt Disney movie
One Hundred and One Dalmatians

Neapolitan Mastiff

Scooby Doo from the cartoon series *Scooby Doo*

Picardy Shepherd/Berger De Picard

Snoopy from the *Charlie Brown* series
by Charles Schultz

Pug

Answer Key

- ◆ Frank (Pug) ... Men in Black (movies 1997/2002_
- ◆ Toto (Cairn Terrier) ... Wizard of Oz (movie 1939)
- ◆ Beethoven (Saint Bernard) ... Beethoven (movie 1992)
- ◆ Fang (Neapolitan Mastiff) ... Harry Potter Films (movies 2001 - Present)
- ◆ Eddie (Jack Russell Terrier) ... TV Show Frasier
- ◆ Nana (Newfoundland) ... book *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie
- ◆ Clifford (Vizsla) ... Book and TV show *The Big Red Dog* by Norman Bridwell
- ◆ Winn-Dixie (Picardy Shepherd/Berger De Picard) ... book *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo
- ◆ Buddy (Golden Retriever) ... the Air Bud movie series
- ◆ Tramp (mixed breed) The Lady and The Tramp Disney film
- ◆ Pongo (Dalmatian) ... Disney's One Hundred and One Dalmatians
- ◆ Scooby Doo, (Great Dane) Scooby Doo cartoon TV series
- ◆ Snoopy (Beagle) ... from the Charlie Brown series by Charles Schultz

Puppy Mills (Puppy Farms)

WHAT ARE PUPPY MILLS

The puppies that you see in the pet store may be cute, but more than likely they aren't happy or healthy. Most puppies you buy from pet stores, and many advertised in newspaper and Internet ads, have been raised on puppy mills (puppy farms) for the sole purpose of profit. Little consideration is given to the living conditions or health of these very social animals, which creates an insecure and often unhealthy pet. The worst examples could be described as "concentration camps" for dogs.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is responsible for setting the standards of puppy mills, but they are minimal. As long as the dogs have food and water they meet the guidelines. But that is not enough. Dogs are social animals that need exercise and greatly benefit from human interaction. None of these is available at a puppy mill. Dogs also need love—at a puppy mill that is in short supply.

The Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org) has a wonderful website with actual footage of puppy mills (“Puppy Mills: An Endless Cycle of Cruelty”), interviews, things you can do to help and reproducible information packets.

Common Problems:

- ◆ **The Mothers:** The owners of puppy mills want to produce as many puppies as possible in a short amount of time. That means breeding dogs as often as possible, and they may have two litters per year. This is hard on the mother dog, and by age 5 or 6 their litters start decreasing and they are no longer any use to the owner. They are sold or more likely killed, often in a very inhumane manner.
- ◆ **Social interaction:** Because puppies are taken from their mothers so early, and because the mothers spend their entire life in a cage, puppies don’t learn how to interact with humans; no one teaches them good behavior. This can result in a highly strung, overly anxious or mean dog.
- ◆ **Health and Living Conditions:** Inbreeding (the process of breeding dogs that are related to each other) can lead to additional health problems, as is often the case in puppy mills. Lack of sanitary conditions (poor cages, overcrowding, the overwhelming smell of urine and feces, lack of vet care, inadequate ventilation) can also lead to unhealthy dogs.

Stopping the Problem:

- ◆ Don’t buy dogs from puppy mills. Ask the owner where the dog came from, or better yet, meet the owner at the place where they raise the dogs.
- ◆ Get your new dog from the local shelter. They have had their shots, are healthy, and the shelter will be there for you if you have any questions or problems.
- ◆ Write to your legislator asking that they make shutting down puppy mills a priority.
- ◆ The following websites (and many more) talk more about puppy mills and how to stop the problem: www.caninerescuecoalition.org (rescuing English and Neapolitan mastiffs), www.cordysrescue.com.au/puppy_farm.htm (puppy rescue farm in Australia)

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY – ASKING QUESTIONS

For older readers – Think about how dogs raised on puppy farms are different from dogs born under caring conditions. Make a chart. For example

	Puppy Mill	Conscientious Breeder
Food	Insect infested, basic	Healthy, fresh
Cages	Wire bottoms so difficult to stand, that it damages feet	A kennel with a flat bottom and plenty of room to move
Vet care	Minimal	All required shots
Puppies	Taken early from mother	Stay with mother at least 8 weeks

Compare the situation of puppies to children in foster care. Are there similarities? Differences? Does a loving and caring home benefit all creatures? (*See also the section on ethics.*)

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY – SPREADING THE WORD

It only takes one person to educate a family or a community – and that person can be the students in your classroom. Have your students research puppy farms, interview pet store owners, legitimate breeders and staff at the local animal shelter. From the information gathered, create a brochure designed to educate the public about puppy mills. Include what they are and what can be done to stop them. Distribute the brochure to other students in the school and at the local animal shelter.

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY – VISITING AN ANIMAL SHELTER

Every year between 6-8 million dogs and cats enter shelters and 3-4 million of these animals must eventually be euthanized (humanely killed) because there are not enough homes for all of them). These animals should be your first choice when looking for a pet. Animal shelters are committed to their animals; they are spayed, neutered and have had their required shots before you take them home. Go to a shelter and see for yourself.

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY – UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE OF A PUPPY MILL DOG

Children, like animals, are social creatures and personalities can change when they are isolated from each other.

1. Challenge your students to go an entire day (or arrange an extended period of time) without speaking to anyone. Have them sit on their upside down chairs for 20 minutes. Serve them only the dry crusts of bread for snack or lunch. If it is winter, open the window of the classroom for a few minutes until it gets uncomfortably cold.
2. Talk about the various situations. How did it feel? Was it hard? Do they appreciate the fact that it isn't always like that? Compare their uncomfortable situations (the ones they experienced as part of this activity) to the life of a dog on a puppy farm. Remind them that those dogs live under miserable conditions continuously and they can't change them – only we can.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: (WWW.HUSBANDRYINSTITUTE.ORG)

1. Ask your grocery store: Where did their meat come from? How was it raised? Were the animals fed antibiotics?
2. Talk to the people at your local food cooperative (Co-op) and ask the same questions.
3. Did the two places give you different answers?

Helping Kids with Cancer

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY – DONATE YOUR HAIR

Locks of Love is a public non-profit organization that provides hairpieces to financially disadvantaged children in the United States and Canada under age 18 who have lost their own hair due to a health problem, just like Sweetie in *A Home for Dakota*. Go to their website (www.locksoflove.org) to find out more about how to donate hair and to see photos of children who have donated or benefited from this program.

A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY – SHARE A STORY

Children in hospitals get lonely. Have your class write short stories, poems or draw pictures of their pets and send them with a short letter to the children in a hospital or Ronald McDonald House.

Teaching Ethics to Children

It is never too early to begin teaching children the difference between right and wrong. Here are some simple ways to begin a discussion about ethics. Additional resources and web based lesson plans are listed in the "Companion Books" section at the end of this teaching guide.

A CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

Use the following questions to initiate a discussion about right and wrong.

- ◆ Which animals are used in a circus act? How are they treated?
- ◆ Which animals do you find in the zoo? Where do they naturally live? What do you think an animal in a zoo needs? Do some zoos treat animals better than others?
- ◆ Have you ever seen a stray (an animal that doesn't have a home)? How did you know it was a stray? How did it look different from other animals?

Companion Books for the Classroom

PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT DOGS

Are You Ready for Me? (Sit! Stay! Read!), Claire Buchwald, illustrated by Amelia Hansen, The Gryphon Press, 2007

Buddy Unchained (Sit! Stay! Read!), Daisy Bix, illustrated by Joe Hyatt, The Gryphon Press, 2006

Dog Breath, Dav Pikey, Scholastic Paperbacks, 2004

Good Boy Fergue! David Shannon The Blue Sky Press, 2006

Harry the Dirty Dog by Gene Zion, illustrated by Margaret Bloy Graham, HarperCollins, 1976

A Home for Dakota (Sit! Stay! Read!), by Jan Zita Grover, illustrated by Nancy Lane, The Gryphon Press, 2008

If My Dad Were a Dog, Annabel Tellis Chicken House Ltd, 2007

Little Dog Moon, Maxine Trottier, illustrated by Laura Fernandex and Rick Jacobson, Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 2006

May I Pet Your Dog? The How-to Guide for Kids Meeting Dogs (and Dogs Meeting Kids), Stephanie Calmenson, illustrated by Jan Ormerod, Clarion Books, 2007

My Pet Puppy, by Marilyn Baillie, illustrated by Jane Kurisu, Kids Can Press, Ltd., 2005.

Rosie's Family: An Adoption Story by Lori Rosove, Asia Pr, 2001.

Rosie: A Visiting Dog's Story, Stephanie Calmenson, photographed by Justin Sutcliffe, Sandpiper, 1998

The Day the Dog Dressed Like Dad James Proimos and Tom Amico Bloomsbury USA Children's Books (August 12, 2004)

YOUNG ADULT NOVELS ABOUT DOGS

- A Dog's Life: Autobiography of a Stray*, Ann M. Martin, Scholastic Paperbacks, 2007
- Because of Winn-Dixie*, Kate DiCamillo, Candlewick; Reprint edition 2009
- Call of the Wild*, Jack London Aladdin, 2003
- Shiloh*, Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, illustrated by Barry Moser, Aladdin, 2000
- Sounder*, William H. Armstrong, illustrated by James Barkley, HarperCollins, 1995
- StoneFox*, John Reynolds Gardiner, illustrated by Greg Hargreaves, HarperCollins, 1992
- The Case of the Runaway Dog, (Jigsaw Jones Mystery, No. 7)*, James Preller and John Speire, Scholastic; Reissue edition, 2001
- The Giggler Treatment*, Roddy Doyle, illustrated by Brian Ajhar, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2001
- The Incredible Journey*, Sheila Burnford, Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 1996
- The Turtle-Hatching Mystery (Dog Watch Series)*, Mary Casanova, illustrated by Omar Rayyan, Aladdin, 2008
- Where the Red Fern Grows*, Wilson Rawls, Yearling, 1996
- White Fang*, Jack London, Scholastic Paperbacks, 2001
- White Star: A Dog on the Titanic*, Marty Crisp Scholastic Inc., 2006
- Woodsong*, Gary Paulsen, Aladdin, 2007

BOOKS AND WEBSITES ABOUT KIDS WITH CANCER AND TEACHING ETHICS TO KIDS

- 103 Questions Children Ask about Right from Wrong (Questions Children Ask)*, James C. Galvin, edited by David R Veerman, Tyndale Kids, 1995
- Jasper's Day*, Marjorie Blain Parker, illustrated by Janet Wilson, Kids Can Press, Ltd., 2002
- What Is Cancer Anyway? Explaining Cancer to Children of All Ages*, Karen L Carney, Dragonfly Publishing, 1998
- www.animalshelter.org (link to shelters in your area)
- www.animalrescuetv.com (TV show)
- www.education-world.com/a_curr/profdev055.shtml (lesson plan - teaching kids to make moral decisions)
- www.kidscancernetwork.org/readwritedraw.html (special activities and stories about and for kids with cancer – includes coloring book and book list)

learningtogive.org/lessons/unit430/lesson2.html (a lesson plan about "Caring for Those Amazing Animals")

www.sharetheworld.com (free educational program designed to help your students better understand and appreciate the animals with whom we share our world. Includes reproducible activities)

www.stoppuppymills.org/inside_a_puppy_mill.html (video and website from the Human Society of the United States about Puppy Mills)

BOOKS, WEBSITES AND LESSON PLANS ABOUT DOGS

A Dog's Best Friend: An Activity Book for Kids and Their Dogs, Lisa Rosenthal, Chicago Review Press, 1999.

A Kid's Best Friend, Maya Aimer, Amex Fischer and Global Fund for Children, Shakti for Children, 2002

www.dogtales.tv Sponsored in part by IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare)

www.dogquotes.com (includes many fun activities, facts and history about dogs)

www.lessonplanspage.com/SSLAWriteAnimalAbuseStanceParagraph56.htm (a lesson plan to teach upper elementary students about animal abuse)

www.loveyourdog.com (a kid's guide to dog care)

www.loveyourdog.com/resources.html (teacher resources and lesson plans based on young adult novels about dogs)

www.theanimalspirit.com/AWE.html (lesson plan about humane treatment of animals)