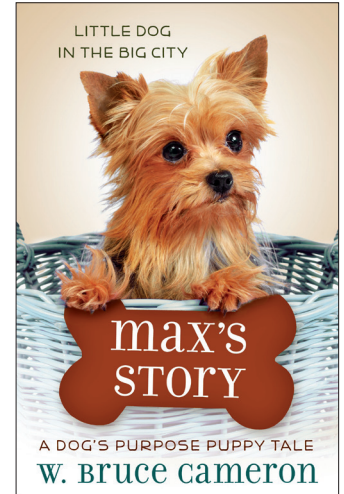
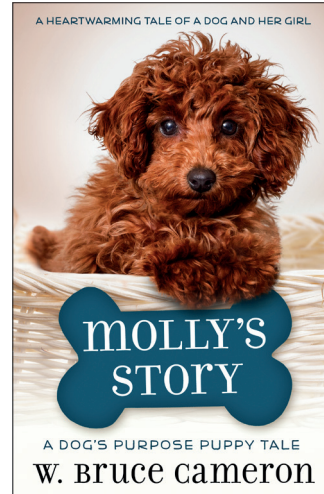
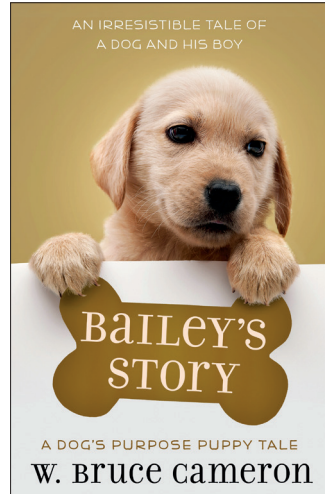
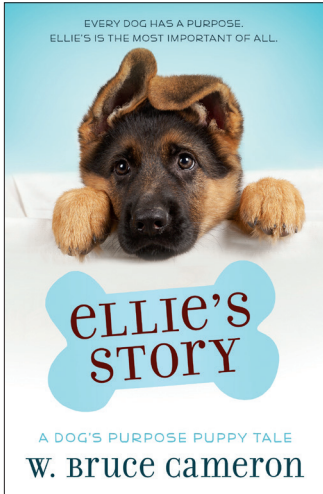




# STARSCAPE

## TEACHER'S GUIDE



## A DOG'S PURPOSE

### Puppy Tales

## W. Bruce Cameron

State Award Lists *Ellie's Story: A Dog's Purpose Tale*  
Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award (2016-2017)  
Maryland Black-Eyed Susan Book Award Nomination,  
Grades 4-6 (2016-2017)  
Colorado Children's Book Award Winner (2017)  
Louisiana Young Readers Choice Nomination, Grades 3-5 (2018)  
Rhode Island Children's Book Award Nomination (2017)

### About this guide

The questions and activities that follow are intended to enhance your reading of W. Bruce Cameron's *A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tales* series. The guide has been developed in alignment with the Common Core state standards; however, please feel free to adapt this content to suit the needs and interests of your students or reading group participants.

Photo credit: Ute Ville



**W. BRUCE CAMERON** is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *A Dog's Purpose*, *A Dog's Journey*, *The Dog Master*, *Ellie's Story*, *Bailey's Story*, *Molly's Story*, and *Max's Story*. He lives in California. Look for him online at [brucecameronbooks.com](http://brucecameronbooks.com), [facebook.com/Adogspurpose](https://facebook.com/Adogspurpose), and on Twitter (@wbrucecameron) and Instagram (@adogspurpose).

### About this series

No one understands humankind's best friends quite like #1 *New York Times* bestselling author W. Bruce Cameron. His *A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tales* series give insight into the unconditional love and loyalty canines naturally share with the humans in their lives. Told from dogs' perspectives, these heartwarming tales impart life lessons and inspire people to reflect upon their bonds and relationships with their furry friends—and understand that every creature on Earth is born with a purpose.

"Ellie's view of the world is spot-on, feeling just like the thoughts dogs must have.... A satisfying and illuminating tale."

—Kirkus Reviews on *Ellie's Story*

"A natural choice for dog lovers."

—Booklist on *Ellie's Story*

"It is often said that dogs are man's best friend, and this book proves it as readers experience life as a dog through Bailey's narration.... Overall, this is a very heartwarming story."

—VOYA on *Bailey's Story*



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Ages 8-12 ★ Grades 3-7 ★ Lexile Level: 720L • AR Level: 4.5 MG • AR Points: 5.0 • AR Quiz: 185487 EN

# Ellie's Story: A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tale

*Ellie's Story: A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tale* describes the life of a search-and-rescue dog, but its unique viewpoint makes it a fantastic resource for children and adults who love dogs simply as pets, too. From puppyhood, to bonding with humans, to working to save lives, readers of all ages will be gripped by Ellie's story and its insights into humankind's best friends.

## READING WITH YOUR CHILDREN

### BEFORE READING THE BOOK: Discussion Questions

Help your young reader get excited about this book by exploring key words and ideas from the story. This will help strengthen the connections children make as they begin to read.

- This book is titled *Ellie's Story: A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tale*. What is a "purpose"? What types of roles do dogs play in your community? What do you think is a dog's most important role?
- What books have you read about dogs? Describe your favorite dog book, noting whether it was fiction or non-fiction, and what you liked best about the story.
- Have you ever tried to train a dog or other pet? If so, what was the most surprising or challenging thing you learned about this process? If not, would you like to try dog training and what kind of dog (or other animal) might you like to train?

### AFTER READING THE BOOK: Discussion Questions

Some or all of the questions below may help launch family conversations or be useful preparation for the activities that follow.

- Who narrates *Ellie's Story*? Were you surprised when you realized the identity of the narrator? Why or why not?
- In chapter one, Jakob chooses Ellie from a litter of German shepherds. What are some of the key qualities he appreciates about her?

- What is "Work" to Ellie? Describe the steps Jakob takes to teach Ellie to understand "Work" and, later, "Find." How is "Play" a very important part of Ellie's training process? Is play important for people, too? Explain your answer.
- How does Jakob help Ellie conquer her fear of water? What rescue described in the story requires Ellie to deal with water? How does Ellie use her sense of smell to find a bad guy?
- What actions does Ellie take in the story that show she is an extraordinary rescue dog?
- Why does Ellie have to leave Jakob and go to live with Maya? How does she react to this transition? How is Ellie's understanding of the change similar to, and different from, the way a human understands such events?
- What challenges does Maya face as she works to become Ellie's handler?
- Ellie describes the different ways she is loved by Jakob, Maya, and other characters. Do these descriptions help you to better understand the relationships your dog (or dogs you know) has with you and other members of your community? Explain your answer.
- List some key search-and-rescue missions Ellie undertakes before the trip to El Salvador. What makes searching through the earthquake rubble in El Salvador so different from her police work in the United States? How does Maya realize this and find a way to help Ellie with this new work?
- Why can't Ellie return to "Work" after El Salvador? What does she do instead? What happens when Ellie and Jakob are reunited in the last chapter of the story? How did you feel when Jakob told Ellie, "You're a good dog"?

## Activities

Take the story from the page to the pavement with these fun and inspiring activities for the dog lovers in your family.

- **MAKE A "DOGS ARE AWESOME" POSTER.** Inspired by the story, have children draw, paint, or glue magazine clippings, printed images found via parent-supervised web searches, or other visual art material onto a large sheet of cardboard or foam core. The poster may include images of dogs playing with people, dogs at work, even dogs in cartoons. Mount the finished work in a place of prominence in your home.
- **TRY AN OBSTACLE COURSE.** As part of her training, Jakob takes Ellie through an agility course. Design an obstacle course for people. Choose a space in your backyard or nearby park. Stations



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might include running between traffic cones, jumping rope, or tunneling under a picnic blanket. Make signs explaining what course runners should do at each station. Be creative! Invite friends or neighbors to try the course. Consider a “parents vs kids” race or other fun challenge on the course.

- **MAKE A LEARNING LIST.** Based on information from the book, collaborate with your child on a list of important “dos” for dog ownership and care. Consider listing things to look for in choosing a puppy, best practices for training young dogs, and ways to keep a growing dog feeling happy and purposeful.
- **TALK LIKE A DOG.** *Ellie’s Story* is narrated in first person by Ellie the German shepherd. This helps readers understand the dog’s point of view and is also a model for helping children see other people’s and animals’ perspectives. Invite your child to describe, in the first person “I,” a few minutes in the life of his or her own pet. Or, invite your child to describe how you, a sibling, or another family member might understand the child’s actions in an exciting or confusing situation.
- **HELP OUT.** Learn more about the work of search-and-rescue dogs at SARDUS ([www.sardogsus.org/index.html](http://www.sardogsus.org/index.html)), find out how dogs help with literacy through the R.E.A.D. program ([www.therapyanimals.org/Contact\\_Us.html](http://www.therapyanimals.org/Contact_Us.html)), visit your local ASPCA, or seek out other dog-friendly organizations in your community. Make a family plan to donate two to four hours (or more) supporting the great work of dogs.

## READING IN YOUR CLASSROOM

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

These Common Core–aligned writing activities may be used in conjunction with the discussion questions in the “Family” section above.

### • POINT-OF-VIEW:

*Ellie’s Story* is narrated by Ellie, the German shepherd. How does the author’s sensory descriptions (sound, sight, taste, touch, and smell) help readers connect with the dog’s viewpoint? What other techniques does the author use to create a believable dog’s voice for the narrative?

### • COMMUNITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Using clues from the tale and your imagination, write a short biography for Jakob or Maya. What led them to join the police force? Where did they discover their love for animals? What critical life experiences did they have just before meeting Ellie? What do you imagine for their future?

### • TEXT TYPE: OPINION PIECE

Write a one-page essay explaining why you think Jakob made a good choice in choosing Ellie as the best possible rescue dog from her litter.

### • TEXT TYPE: NARRATIVE

In the character of Maya, write several journal entries describing your dreams, doubts about, and plans to become Ellie’s new handler.

### • RESEARCH & PRESENT: EL SALVADORAN EARTHQUAKES

Go to the library or online to learn more about the devastating earthquakes that hit El Salvador in 2001, and the role of rescue dogs in helping with recovery efforts. Use your research to create a PowerPoint or other multimedia style presentation to share with friends or classmates.

### • RESEARCH & PRESENT: RESCUE DOGS

Go online to learn more about search-and-rescue dogs. (Hint: Begin your research at [www.sardogsus.org/index.html](http://www.sardogsus.org/index.html).) Create an informative booklet that describes the training, the types of rescues dogs can accomplish, and other facts. If possible, make copies of your booklet to distribute to others in your school or community.

Supports English Language Arts Common Core Writing Standards: W.3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7; W.4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7; W.5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.7; W.6.2, 6.3, 6.7; W.7.2, 7.3, 7.7

## *Bailey’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose* *Puppy Tale*

*Bailey’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose Puppy Tale* describes the life of a beloved pet from the canine’s point of view. From rough beginnings in a puppy mill to life as the devoted friend of “his boy,” Ethan, Bailey’s story will warm reader’s hearts and deepen their empathy with mankind’s best friend.

## READING WITH YOUR CHILDREN

## BEFORE READING THE BOOK:

## Discussion Questions

Help your young reader get excited about this book by exploring key words and ideas from the story. This will help strengthen the connections children make as they begin to read.

- This book is titled *Bailey’s Story: A Dog’s*



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*Purpose Puppy Tale.* What is a “purpose”? What types of roles do dogs play in your community? What do you think is a dog’s most important role?

- Have you ever had a pet? Describe how the pet came into your family and what you knew (or wondered) about your pet’s life before he arrived in your home. If you do not have a pet, what kind of pet might you like to have, why, and how might you find such an animal?
- How many examples can you list of ways dogs help their human friends? Consider how your pet helps you in your home, how service dogs help people with special needs, and how dogs are part of military, police, and other service organizations. If desired, keep your list on a home bulletin board, whiteboard, or a sheet of paper, and add to it as you read this book—and afterward!

## AFTER READING THE BOOK: Discussion Questions

Some or all of the questions below may help launch family or classroom conversations or be useful preparation for the activities that follow.

- *Bailey’s Story* is narrated by Bailey, the dog. Were you surprised when you realized who was telling this story? Why or why not? What sorts of things does Bailey notice that a human narrator might not notice?
- How does Bailey come to “know the boy very well” in the early chapters of the book? If you could “speak dog” and explain things more thoroughly to Bailey, what might you try to clarify so he could better understand Ethan’s activities with his dad, his need to go to school, the “game” of “Dog Door,” and the experience of the “Dog House”?
- In chapter 6, Ethan and Bailey make a dangerous friend named Todd, who tries to keep Bailey for himself. What kind of kid is Todd? Would you call Todd a “bully”? What advice would you give Ethan about spending time with Todd? Are there reasons readers should feel bad for Todd? Explain your answers.
- What is “The Farm”? Do you think you would like to spend the summer at “The Farm”? Why is “The Farm” wonderful for Bailey and for Ethan? What kinds of freedom do Ethan and Bailey have at “The Farm” that they do not have at home? What happens when summer ends?
- How does Bailey behave at moments in the story when he is lonely, frustrated, or uncertain? How are his behaviors treated by Ethan and his parents? Describe a moment in your own life when you felt unsure or worried. What

did you say and do? Compare and contrast your human actions to Bailey’s animal responses to similar emotions.

- In chapter 12, Ethan is left alone at “The Farm” for the first time. Describe what happens when Ethan decides to ride Flare out for a picnic. Do you think Ethan should have made this choice? Why or why not? How does Bailey help when Ethan gets into trouble? Does he understand he is helping? What would Bailey say is his most important job in life?
- In chapters 14, 15, and 16, readers experience Ethan’s high school life through Bailey’s eyes. How do Ethan’s main interests change? Does Bailey’s understanding of his job as “Ethan’s boy” change during these years? Why or why not?
- What warning signs that Todd is becoming more dangerous does Bailey observe but not understand? Do you think Ethan behaves well toward Todd in these chapters and during their fight at the end of chapter 17? Explain your answer.
- How does Bailey become a hero in Chapters 18 and 19? What terrible thing happens to Ethan as these events unfold? Does your family have an emergency plan in case there is a fire or other dangerous event at your house? Describe this plan—or have the conversation today!
- After the fire, Ethan’s life is dramatically changed. How does Bailey understand the changes in Ethan? What happens when Bailey and Ethan return to “The Farm” after the accident? What reunion does Bailey help make happen? How does Bailey help Ethan remember what he can still do?
- After reading *Bailey’s Story*, how might you describe a pet dog’s most important purpose in one sentence?

## Activities

Take the story from the page to the pavement with these fun and inspiring activities for the dog lovers in your family.

- **GOLDEN RETRIEVERS.** Go to the library or online to learn more about this popular dog breed. (Hint: Visit [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org).) Make a list of things Bailey does in the course of the story that show he has the key qualities of a Golden Retriever. If desired, try this activity with your own pet’s breed, or do this research for a breed of dog you are considering owning as a pet someday.
- **DOG PROOFING.** Bailey sometimes gets into trouble by chewing shoes, eating garbage, or entering/exiting places he should not. Take a walk through your home or yard. Bring a notepad and note the things



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you would have to “Bailey proof” if he were your pet. Are your doors well secured? Where do you keep your kitchen garbage? Do you have other pets, such as cats, that might help Bailey get into trouble? What easily found shoes, plastic toys, or other items might be big temptations for Bailey if he were home alone? After your exploration, discuss what you learned about your home from exploring it from this viewpoint. Does it cause you to make any home or yard changes for the pets in your life?

- **A DOG COMMUNITY.** Bailey finds furry friends in his neighborhood. Are your neighbors, nearby relatives, or friends also animal fans? Celebrate your canine community with a “playdate” in your neighborhood or at a local dog park. Make invitations for adults, kids, and dogs to come to your event. Prepare human and animal-friendly snacks. Plan activities such as relay races or make-a-safe-pet-toy crafts. Be creative! Have fun! Celebrate the joy of family pets!
- **PET CHAT.** *Bailey’s Story* is narrated in the first person by Bailey, the Golden Retriever. This helps readers understand the dog’s point of view and is also a model for helping children see other people’s and animals’ perspectives. Invite your child to describe, using “I,” a few minutes in the life of his or her own pet. If desired, invite your child to describe, using “I,” an experience in the life of a younger sibling, parent, grandparent, or friend.
- **HELP OUT.** Bailey is a lucky dog to have been rescued and adopted by Ethan’s family. Your child can help more unhappy dogs find safe, happy homes by designing an awareness-raising poster. Brainstorm poster titles (e.g., “DON’T SHOP AT PUPPY MILLS,” “ADOPT A SHELTER PET,” or “BE KIND TO DOGS”). Consider using paint, markers, colored pencils, photographs, or other images found online or cut from magazines. Once your decisions are made, create your poster. Visit a nearby supermarket, veterinarian, or library with your child and encourage him/her to ask if they have a good spot to hang your poster. Take a photo of your child beside their mounted poster to share with friends and family!

dog” Bailey is visiting their school with Ethan. Write two to three paragraphs from Bailey’s viewpoint including his experience of arriving at the school entrance, meeting various students and teachers, and the view from the front of the auditorium or a classroom as Ethan tells their story.

- **COMMUNITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS:** Bailey enjoys joining Ethan for fun and games in the neighborhood. Using clues from the novel, write a welcome letter to families who might be new to Ethan’s neighborhood. In your letter, introduce the kids and pets in the neighborhood, and describe the kinds of fun they enjoy in different seasons. Then, write a welcome letter to families who might move to your own neighborhood, including people, pets, activities, and other interesting details. Read your letters aloud to friends or classmates. What similarities and differences do you see between Ethan’s community and your own or between the real-life neighborhoods of your classmates? What good qualities do most communities share?
- **TEXT TYPE: OPINION PIECE**  
Write a one-page essay explaining what you think Ethan should have done to end the argument he and Todd had at the end of chapter 17, and whether you think Ethan should feel partly responsible for Todd starting the fire. Does any argument justify putting people’s lives at risk?
- **TEXT TYPE: NARRATIVE**  
In the character of Hannah, write the story of how Bailey helped your friendship with Ethan grow. Or, in the character of Todd, write the story of why you tried to kidnap Bailey when you were young and why Ethan makes you feel so angry.
- **RESEARCH & PRESENT: PROTECT OUR PUPS**  
Although Bailey does not realize this, he was born in a “puppy mill” or “puppy farm,” a place focused more on breeding dogs for profit than on their health and safety. Go to the library or online to learn more about the problems with many puppy mills. (Hint: Visit [www.humanesociety.org](http://www.humanesociety.org) or [www.PAWS.org](http://www.PAWS.org).) Have small groups of students create oral presentations encouraging dog lovers to avoid puppy mills, how, and why. If possible, have students give their presentations to others in their grade or school.
- **RESEARCH & PRESENT: FIRE SAFETY**  
Bailey saves the family from a terrible fire. Go online to learn more about how families can plan for a fire emergency. (Hint: Begin your research at [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org).) Create an informative booklet or informational poster sharing what you have learned. If possible, make copies of your booklet to distribute to others in your school or community.

## READING IN YOUR CLASSROOM

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

These Common Core–aligned writing activities may be used in conjunction with the discussion questions in the “Family” section above.

- **POINT OF VIEW:** *Bailey’s Story* is narrated by Bailey, the Golden Retriever. To make this feel realistic, the author relies heavily on sensory descriptions, especially scents, sounds, and tastes. Have students imagine “hero



## ***Molly's Story: A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tale***

*Molly's Story: A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tale* describes the life of a mixed-breed dog from her birth in the home of a kindly woman who fosters strays to her puppyhood with CJ, a young girl with a difficult home life to the discovery of her talents as a cancer-sniffing dog and loyal companion. This fast-paced story of how an unwanted pup and her lonely girl help each other find their talents will warm readers' hearts while encouraging them to reflect on what it takes to build a strong, supportive family.

### **READING WITH YOUR CHILDREN**

## **BEFORE READING THE BOOK: Discussion Questions**

Help your young reader get excited about this book by exploring key words and ideas from the story. This will help strengthen the connections children make as they begin to read.

- Titles in the *A Dog's Purpose* Puppy Tales series explore the ways canines partner with and support human beings. What roles do dogs play in your life, and in the lives of your family, friends, and community members? List any other books or articles you have read, or any television programs or movies you have watched, about dogs helping humans. What abilities do dogs have that make them especially helpful to humans?
- *Molly's Story* begins in the home of a woman who fosters stray animals. In what ways might a dog become a stray, or find itself in an animal shelter? What might be some situations in which it is not the best plan for a family to adopt a pet? What are some issues a family might discuss before making the commitment to adopt a pet?

## **AFTER READING THE BOOK:**

## **Discussion Questions**

Some or all of the questions below may help launch family or classroom conversations, or be useful preparation for the activities that follow.

- *Molly's Story* is narrated by Molly, the dog herself. How does the dog's perspective impact the objects described and the way human discussions are understood?
- In chapter 1, Jennifer uses the phrase "foster failure." What does this mean? What other insights does Jennifer have about dogs and people?
- How does Molly feel when she first sees CJ? Does CJ have permission to adopt Molly? What actions does CJ take when she brings Molly home?
- Who is Gloria? What does Gloria do that makes her seem like an imperfect parent? Several times in the story, Gloria tells CJ that her behavior is "embarrassing." Is it, in fact, CJ who is behaving poorly in these situations? If you were Gloria's child, how do you think you would feel?
- Why does a truant officer come to CJ's home in chapter 5? How does the truant officer's visit change CJ's daily life? How does it change Molly's life?
- Who is Shane? How does CJ meet Shane? How does Shane get CJ into trouble in Chapter 9? What advice might you have given CJ about trusting Shane? What reasons can you imagine for Shane's behavior and choices?
- In chapter 10, as part of her community service, CJ meets a researcher named Andi. What does CJ do for Andi? What does CJ learn about Andi's research? What does Molly learn? Compare the way Molly learns Andi's lesson with the way she learns to stay quiet in CJ's basement earlier in the story.
- What difficult events in Chapters 11 and 12 make having her picture selected for an art exhibit a less-than-happy occasion for CJ? How do these events involve Gloria, Gus, and Sheryl?
- What mean trick does Gloria play in chapter 13? How does CJ find Molly and figure out what Gloria has done? What does CJ feel forced to do after she brings Molly home? How do CJ and Molly survive for the next few days?
- At the end of chapter 15, Andi tells CJ, "You can't run away from your problems. They'll always find you." Do you think this is good advice? How does CJ react to Andi's words?
- How does Sheryl help save the day at the



end of chapter 16? What good news does she give CJ in chapter 17? Where does Sheryl spot CJ's painting? How might this be a hopeful sign for CJ's relationship with Gloria? What agreement does Sheryl help CJ and Gloria make with each other?

- Through her family troubles, and inspired by her love for Molly, CJ discovers an artistic talent. In what ways might this surprise discovery help CJ over time? Do you have an artistic or athletic outlet, such as drawing, singing, dancing, playing soccer, or running, that helps you work through strong emotions? Do you think it is important to have such an outlet? Why or why not?
- Although Molly often tries to protect CJ, could it be that CJ's desire to protect her dog helps her learn to care for herself? Why or why not? Cite examples from the story in your answer.
- After reading *Molly's Story*, how might you describe a pet dog's most important purpose in one sentence?

## Activities

Take the story from the page to the pavement with these fun and inspiring activities for the dog lovers in your family.

- **DOG DIETS.** Molly reacts to the strong salty taste in ham, and is sickened by eating old food. Dogs benefit from healthy, appropriate diets just like people do. Imagine you have a small, part-poodle pup such as Molly, or another dog of your choosing. Visit the food section of a pet store, talk to a veterinarian, or do online research to create an ideal meal plan for this pet. (Hint: Visit [www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/facts/pet\\_food\\_safety.html?credit=web\\_id93480558](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/facts/pet_food_safety.html?credit=web_id93480558).) What are some best-food choices? How often should this pet be fed? What would be some healthy treats? What human foods might be especially dangerous to this dog and how can they be stored securely away? Invite your child to share what she/he has learned with other young pet owners or dog fans.
- **PET VIEWPOINTS.** *Molly's Story* is narrated in the first person by Molly, the poodle mix. This helps readers understand the dog's point of view and is also a model for helping children see other people's and animals' perspectives. Invite your child to describe, in the first person "I," a few minutes in the life of his or her own pet. If desired, invite your child to describe an experience in the life of a younger sibling, parent, grandparent, or friend.
- **HELP OUT.** Molly is a lucky dog to have been fostered in a welcoming home and found her way to CJ's heart. Many strays and unwanted pets are not so lucky. Help your child find ways to help these unlucky animals, such

as donating to a pet food drive, volunteering at a local shelter, or designing a poster to raise awareness about this problem. Brainstorm poster titles (e.g., "FOSTER OUR FURRY FRIENDS" or "CAN YOU HELP A STRAY DOG?") and information, such as a phone number or web address for a local pet shelter. Organize your art materials, such as poster paper, paint, markers, colored pencils, and/or images found online or cut from magazines. Create your poster. Visit a nearby supermarket, pet hospital, or library with your child and encourage him/her to ask if they have a good spot to hang their poster. Take a photo of your child beside their mounted poster to share with friends and family!

## READING IN YOUR CLASSROOM

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

These Common Core-aligned writing activities may be used in conjunction with the discussion questions in the "Family" section above.

- **POINT OF VIEW:** *Molly's Story* is narrated by Molly the dog, but other characters' viewpoints are also critical to understanding this story. Have students write a two to three paragraph, first-person account of the day Molly met "her girl," the truant officer's visit in Chapter 5, the art class, or CJ's nights spent at friends' houses in Chapter 14 from the viewpoint of CJ, Gloria, Trent, Sheryl, or another character.
- **COMMUNITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS:** Through their work, both Sheryl and Andi interact with CJ without being able to completely address her difficult home situation. Using details from the novel, write a short report describing Sheryl's art classroom or Andi's research space. Explain the goals of their programs, and the people they hope to help. Read your reports aloud to friends or classmates. Discuss the ways in which each program was helpful to CJ. What did CJ and Molly learn? What similar, good qualities do the programs share? Are there programs in your own community that might have been helpful to CJ? How might a young person help a troubled friend or classmate find a helpful class or other resource?
- **TEXT TYPE: OPINION PIECE**  
Both Molly and CJ are "strays" in different ways. Write a one-page essay exploring the meaning of the word "stray" and the ways in which this story might be read as two strays' journeys of beating the odds together.
- **TEXT TYPE: NARRATIVE**  
In the character of CJ, write the story of how Molly helped you learn more about true



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friendship and how this helped your friendship with Trent grow. Or, in the character of Shane, write the story of why you stole from Sheryl, why you got so angry with CJ, and, maybe, why you are jealous of CJ.

▪ **RESEARCH & PRESENT: PET HOMELESSNESS**

Although Molly is a great help to CJ, the girl and her dog find themselves in several risky home situations during the story. Go to the library or online to learn more about how pets lose their home situations and how this can be prevented. (Hint: Visit <http://www.asPCA.org/animal-homelessness>.) Use this research to create two checklists, one entitled “Are You Ready to Adopt a Pet?” and one entitled “Can You Help Save an Animal from Homelessness?” Have students make copies of their checklists to share with people in their community. If desired, offer copies of the list to be made available at your local library, animal shelter, or pet hospital.

▪ **RESEARCH & PRESENT: CANCER DETECTION & OTHER AMAZING ANIMAL ABILITIES**

Molly’s actions help Sheryl detect her cancer early, making her treatment more effective. Visit the websites listed at the back of the book to learn more about dogs that may be able to detect diseases or predict seizures, horses that may help with psychotherapies, or cats that may help autistic kids. Have small groups of students create oral presentations about their findings. If possible, have students give their presentations to others in their grade or school.

Supports English Language Arts Common Core Writing Standards: W.3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7; W.4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7; W.5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.7; W.6.2, 6.3, 6.7; W.7.2, 7.3, 7.7

## ***Max’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose Puppy Tale***

*Max’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose Puppy Tale* introduces readers to Max, a spunky Chihuahua-Yorkshire terrier (Yorkie) mixed-breed puppy with a big personality and an even bigger heart. Written from Max’s perspective, the story follows the spirited pup’s journey from a dog shelter into the life and heart of CJ, a young girl struggling to feel at home in bustling New York City, where she’s attending a special art program for the summer. As they “train each other” to be a good owner and pet, respectively, Max and CJ also teach each other important lessons about how to bridge the sometimes confusing gap between how you see the world and how the world sees you. (CJ is also a key character in W. Bruce Cameron’s *Molly’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose Puppy Tale*. If you have read, or have an opportunity to read, that story as well, you might enjoy comparing CJ’s experiences with Molly to her adventures with Max.)

## **READING WITH YOUR CHILDREN**

### **BEFORE READING**

#### **THE BOOK:**

#### **Discussion Questions**

Help your young reader get excited about this book by exploring key words and ideas from the story. This will help strengthen the connections children make as they begin to read.

- The central relationship in *Max’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose Puppy Tale* is between a puppy and a person. Do you have a special relationship with a pet in your life, or can you imagine what it might be like if you did? Usually, we think of a person training, or teaching, a pet. In this story, a young girl named CJ learns a lot from a small puppy. Can you think of something you learned from an experience with your own pet, a friend’s pet, a class pet, or from reading a story, or watching a movie, about a special animal?
- In this story, the human main character, CJ, hopes to be an artist. In order to attend a special art program, she has to live away from home for the summer, be apart from another beloved pet (her dog back home, Molly), and get used to life in a big city. Do you have a dream, or a goal that you are working toward in school, sports, the arts, or another area? Do you have to make sacrifices, or face challenges, like CJ does, to pursue your dream?

### **AFTER READING THE**

#### **BOOK:**

#### **Discussion Questions**

Some or all of the questions below may help launch family conversations or be useful preparation for the activities that follow.

- *Max’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose Puppy Tale* is told entirely from Max’s perspective. Max doesn’t understand human language, but he manages to successfully “translate,” or interpret, at least parts of people’s conversations. What “cues” does he use to do this?
- At first, Max perceives Gail and the other shelter workers and puppies, as “giants.” But eventually he realizes that is not the case. In chapter 1, he thinks: “And that’s when I realized an important truth. All of the dogs around me and the women who took



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care of us—they weren't big. It was the other way around. I was small!" How does this realization affect Max? How does it influence the way he acts toward people and other dogs? How does Max's view of himself differ from how his caretakers view him?

- How does Max take matters into his own hands at the second adoption event, to get to CJ and alert her that she "made a mistake" to leave without him? What are some of the physical obstacles Max encounters in getting to CJ? What are some of the personal challenges CJ has to consider before agreeing to adopt Max?
- In chapter 4, Gail, the shelter worker, tells CJ: "Dogs sometimes choose their people. We don't know how they know, but they just know. And that's what I think has happened with you and Max." Do you agree with Gail? Do you think animals choose their people, or people choose their animals? Why do you think Max is drawn to CJ? In what ways do they both have to act bigger, or braver, than they actually are, or feel?
- How does CJ's mother's friend Jillian (who CJ is staying with for the summer) react to Max's arrival? How does Jillian's cat (Sneakers) react? How does the relationship between Max and Sneakers evolve, or change, over the course of the story? Do you think two pets, like Max and Sneakers, can become "friends"? Why or why not?
- In chapter 5, Max says: "That was one of my jobs, keeping my girl happy. And the other was to protect her from anything that might hurt her." Max's sense of purpose is the driving force behind many of his feelings and actions. Can you cite some examples from the story that illustrate how Max fulfills his purpose? What are some of the things he does to make CJ happy? What are some of the things he does to keep her safe?
- In chapter 6, as she struggles with a drawing, CJ worries aloud to Max that she's not talented enough to succeed in her art program. Then Jillian enters. What do we learn about CJ from the conversation that follows? What kind of relationship does CJ seem to have with her mother? What does Jillian think about CJ's art program? How does CJ feel about being in New York City?
- How does having Max help CJ develop her friendship with Stella? What do you think Stella means when she says Max is "a New York dog" in chapter 8? How do Max's toughness and curiosity inspire CJ's discovery of her own "survival skills" for city living?
- What are the naughty things Max and Sneakers do in chapters 8 and 9 that lead Jillian to change her mind about allowing CJ to keep Max? How much time does she give CJ to find Max a new home?
- In chapter 11, CJ says: "I needed Molly so much, Max. I was younger when I got her, and stuff at home...it wasn't

so great. But you—it's different with you. You need me." Do you agree with CJ's perspective, that Max needs her? Or do you agree with Max's belief that CJ needs him? Can both be correct? Can an animal and a person "rescue each other"?

- What does Max do when he sees Sneakers trapped by the mean dog, Baxter, in the alley near Jillian's apartment? Do you think Max does the right thing when he disobeys CJ's command to "stay"? Why do you think Max notes: "I'd go back to being CJ's dog in a minute, but first I needed to teach Baxter exactly who was in charge in this alley." Is Max the only "hero" in Sneakers's rescue? What role does Duke, the Great Dane, play? How does the incident with Baxter and Sneakers change Jillian's view of Max? How does Jillian's behavior toward Max change?
- In chapter 13, CJ hesitates at first, but then tells a man who is trying to cut off Stella, CJ, and Max from a cab Stella had called over for them: "I've got an important dog!" How does CJ's choice to get into the cab and make this bold statement demonstrate how her attitude has changed? How has Max's conviction that he is important helped CJ to realize her own value and importance?
- In the last chapter, CJ's mother Gloria comments that CJ has come back from her summer in the city "a completely new person." Do you think she means it as a compliment or an insult? Why?
- How does Max react to CJ's friend, Trent? What does Max think of CJ's other dog, Molly? Do you get the sense that Max will be able to form a new "pack" that includes Trent and Molly? Do you think you will see dogs differently, now that you've read *Max's Story: A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tale*?

## Activities

Take the story from the page to the pavement with these fun and inspiring activities for the dog lovers in your family.

- **THE DOG'S-EYE VIEW AND YOURS, TOO.** All the characters, scenes, and events in this story are presented from Max's puppy perspective. How might a person's description, or perception, of some of these things be different from Max's? Invite your child to choose a person, place, or event from the story (CJ; Jillian's apartment; or a dog-walking outing, for example) and describe it to you in his or her own words. Together, discuss the similarities and differences between Max's and your child's descriptions. Discuss how size, eye level, knowledge of language, sharpness of senses, priorities, and purpose might influence the descriptions.



- **ART FROM THE HEART.** At one point in the story, CJ is second-guessing her artistic ability. She feels disappointed when the instructor calls one of her drawings “inauthentic,” suggesting something about it doesn’t “ring true,” or the work feels forced or artificial. When CJ focuses on subjects she feels passionate about, and can closely relate to, like her beloved Max, or the black Lab playing with his “boy” in Central Park, her artwork improves. Invite your child to think about a pet, person, or place he or she feels passionate about, and encourage them to do a drawing, painting, or modeling-clay sculpture. Gather supplies such as colored pencils, erasers, markers, brushes, paint, and paper. Perhaps you can invite other family members or friends to create art as well. You might even mount pictures on poster board and display sculptures in an art show for family, friends, or neighbors to enjoy.

- **HOW CAN YOU HELP?** In the story, Gail and the shelter workers are working hard to help homeless puppies like Max. As Gail explains to CJ, shelters don’t have an endless supply of resources. You and your child might host a “Lend a Paw a Hand” Party, and bring a group of friends and family members together to make pet-safe items to donate to the shelter. Look online to find instructions for easy-to-make, pet-safe toys and treats. Print out directions and recipes. Invite guests to bring felt or fleece scraps, recyclable plastic bottles, and other found items from around their homes. You and your child can deliver the “goodies” to the shelter. If possible, ask a shelter staff member if they can email some pictures of pets enjoying the goodies for you to share with the folks who helped make them.

## READING IN YOUR CLASSROOM

## WRITING ACTIVITIES

These Common Core–aligned writing activities may be used in conjunction with the discussion questions in the “Family” section above.

- **POINT OF VIEW:** Max, the feisty Chihuahua-Yorkie protagonist and narrator of *Max’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose Puppy Tale*, encounters Sneakers the cat, at the apartment where his “girl” CJ is spending the summer. Max is bewildered by Sneaker’s decidedly noncanine ways. But what does Sneakers think of Max? What does sharing “her” apartment with a rambunctious newcomer look like from Sneakers’s perspective? Have students write two to three paragraphs from Sneakers’s point of view. Use the humorous and compelling voice the author created for Max as a model. Take special note of the unique details, sensory-driven descriptions, and reinforcement of key character traits the author used to lend Max’s voice

authenticity.

- **COMMUNITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS:** Although she is surrounded by a city full of people and possibilities, CJ feels lonely and disconnected in New York City. With Max’s help, CJ cultivates a friendship with Stella, and explores more of New York City. Through her dog-walking job and excursions to dog-friendly Central Park, CJ discovers a fluid but friendly “canine community” of dogs and dog lovers, that reveals a softer, more playful, side of New York and New Yorkers. If CJ had known about all of this before she arrived in New York City, she probably would have had a more comfortable transition to her summer “home.” Have students write a series of welcome postcards” to CJ. Include postcards from Jillian, CJ’s art teacher, Gail (the shelter worker), Stella, and, of course, Max. Using details from the novel and your imagination, think about what each of these “pen pals” might tell CJ, to get her excited about her upcoming summer in New York City.

- **TEXT TYPE: OPINION PIECE**

In the story, Max makes humorous observations about how humans use, or perhaps overuse, technology. He thinks CJ and Jillian should spend less time with cell phones and computers and more time with dogs like him. There is a saying that there can be “truth in humor.” Do you think Max has a point? Do you think technology sometimes takes up too much time in people’s lives today? Write a one-page essay explaining why you agree or disagree with Max on this point.

- **TEXT TYPE: NARRATIVE**

From the point of view of Jillian, write the story of your summer with CJ and Max. How did your positive (and negative) experiences with them affect your view of dogs in general, and Max in particular? How did your opinion of CJ’s artistic potential change? What did you learn about bravery and loyalty from Max and CJ’s relationship, or from the bond that developed between Max and your own cat, Sneakers? Is what you gained from CJ and Max a “fair trade” for the inconvenience they sometimes caused in your life and home?

- **RESEARCH & PRESENT: FOSTERING PETS IN NEED**

In *Max’s Story: A Dog’s Purpose Puppy Tale*, Gail and the shelter workers are trying to find people to adopt Max and other homeless puppies. Fostering or caring for a pet in your home for a designated time is another important way people can help dogs and other pets in need. Go to the library or online to learn more about fostering, or your local shelter’s foster program. (HINT: Visit [www.paws.org/get-involved/foster/](http://www.paws.org/get-involved/foster/) for a helpful overview of fostering, and to check out an example of a foster program in action.) Use your research to create an informative booklet



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about fostering programs and opportunities. If possible, make copies to share with classmates, friends, and other members of your school community.

▪ **RESEARCH & PRESENT: WHICH BREED DO YOU NEED?**

In *Max's Story: A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tale*, CJ walks dogs of different breeds, and with different personalities. CJ's special relationship with Max illustrates that some dogs, or dog breeds, are only "a good fit" for particular owners or situations. Go to the library or online to learn more about different breeds. (Hint: Visit [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)) Reaching out to local vets or breeders might be helpful, too. Select two to three breeds you find interesting. Find out about their personalities, energy levels, space and exercise requirements, grooming needs, and health issues. Use your research to create a PowerPoint or other multimedia style presentation to share with your classmates. Include your recommendations for the kinds of owners or environments you'd recommend for each of the breeds.

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