

INSPIRED BY A
REAL-LIFE RESCUE DOG

GROVER MCBANE RESCUE DOG

GROVER
FINDS
A HOME



TEACHING NOTES BY BROOKE CLARK

About Brooke Clark

Brooke Clark is a senior editor with thirteen years' experience in book publishing. With in-house experience at Lothian Books (now part of Hachette), Lonely Planet Publications and Macmillan Education, as well as extensive freelancing experience, she has worked on books for both children and adults, but her passion is children's books.

Grover McBane, Rescue Dog: Grover Finds a Home

Claire Garth

Synopsis

Grover is stuck in his owner's yard during a thunderstorm. He's scared, cold and wet, and can't remember the last time the Man with Big Boots fed him.

As the storm worsens, Grover becomes more afraid, until he can't stand it anymore. He has a heavy metal chain around his neck, attached to a wooden stake. The ground around the stake becomes muddy in the rain, and the stake becomes looser and looser until Grover manages to pull it out of the ground. He squeezes through a gap under the gate and escapes. He runs and runs, as far away from the Man with Big Boots as he can.

Early the next morning, Grover is picked up by a man in a big white van. Inside a cage in the van, Grover feels scared. But he discovers that he isn't alone; in the van with him is Clara, a kind dog that reminds him of his mother. He learns from Clara that the man driving the van is an animal ranger and he is taking them to an animal shelter. Grover is still frightened. What will happen to him there?

The van arrives at the animal shelter and the vet comes to get Grover out of his cage. Grover isn't sure he can trust the vet, but Clara, familiar with the animal shelter because she regularly runs away from her home, convinces him the vet will help him. He lets the vet give him a treat and take him inside, where she and her assistant, Annie, check him over and treat his sore ears. They are very kind and gentle with Grover, which calms him. They weigh and bath him and give him breakfast, and he feels much better. Grover hears them saying he's too frail to stay in the kennels, and begins worrying about what that means, and where they might send him. He's afraid to go back to the Man with Big Boots, who mistreated him, not feeding him regularly, leaving him chained up outside no matter what the weather, and squirting him with a hose when he was naughty.

When he realises he's going back to Annie's house instead, he's relieved and excited. He has a great time riding to her house in the car, smelling all the wonderful smells out the car window.

When he arrives, Grover meets Annie's partner, David, and Lucy, a little girl who lives next door. Both of them are just as kind as Annie. It's warm and cozy inside, and he goes straight to sleep on a dog bed that's just for him. When he wakes up, David

gives him most delicious dinner he's ever tasted. Then, much to his amazement, he is allowed to sleep in his own bed inside the house that night.

The next morning, Annie tells Grover he will be staying with her and David forever, and he is overwhelmed with happiness. He has a real family now, and a safe, warm home, which is all he's ever wanted.

Themes

This junior-fiction chapter-book focuses on animal abandonment, animal welfare, the good work that animal shelters do, responsible pet ownership and empathy for animals.

Animal abandonment

Grover is one of those unlucky pets with an uncaring owner; through his story, the book aims to raise children's awareness of the fact that not all pets are lucky enough to have an owner who loves and looks after them. They may be treated badly, and they may escape or be abandoned by their owner, with no-one to look after them.

Animal welfare

The book highlights the important role animal shelters play in society, rescuing unwanted or neglected animals. Many animals are housed in animal shelters, needing a home and a family to love them, and the shelters provide a responsible way for people to choose a new family pet.

Responsible pet ownership

Grover's owner did not care for him as he should have. Owning a pet means providing food and shelter, keeping the pet clean, showing love and taking the pet to the vet for regular check-ups. Grover did not feel loved and cared for, and he was hungry and cold. He would rather escape than stay in the Man with Big Boots' backyard any longer.

Empathy for animals

Grover's plight highlights the importance of showing empathy for and compassion to animals, recognising that they have feelings and can be hurt and afraid just as people can. The book allows great insight into Grover's thoughts and feelings, showing the reader how hungry and afraid he is, and how emotionally and physically damaged he is because of his owner's mistreatment of him.

Writing Style

Claire Garth has a clear, relatable writing style that is well pitched to children aged six to nine.

Garth writes from Grover's point of view, allowing the reader intimate access to the dog's thoughts and feelings and promoting in the reader a level of empathy for the dog's situation that may not have been possible if the story had been told by an external narrator. She articulates Grover's thoughts and uses dialogue to show Grover expressing himself: '*I wonder if he has forgotten I'm out here*, Grover thought to himself. A huge clap of thunder made him jump up in fright. "Help!" Grover barked, "I'm scared and I'm hungry and I want to get out of the rain!"'

Descriptive language places the reader in the story, with expressive verbs helping to illustrate Grover's fear: 'he scrunched his wet body up small and tight to try to stay warm'; 'Grover whimpered ...'.

Descriptive language is also used to show how Grover has been emotionally scarred by his treatment: 'Grover started to panic – Clara had gone through the big gate. Why wasn't he going there? Where was he going? Was there a separate section for naughty dogs? He didn't like this one bit. Grover began to feel dizzy. He cowered on the ground and closed his eyes.'

Garth has also been deliberate in the way she names the human characters. The name 'the Man with Big Boots' evokes an owner who is dominating and unfriendly, and keeps himself at a distance. In contrast, Grover knows the real names of Dr Cole, the caring vet, and Annie and David, who become his new owners.

Learning Activities

These discussion points and activities are designed to assist you in presenting the book to students. They encourage extended discussion and further thought about the story or themes. They are easy to modify and are not intended to be prescriptive.

CHARACTERS

1. Write a report describing Grover – both his appearance and his personality. Why might his experience with the Man with Big Boots make him act the way he does?
2. Grover is a border collie. In groups, research this breed. What do border collies look like? What personality do they have?
3. Draw a portrait of Grover. In his facial expression, show how he feels after he has found a new home with Annie. What do his eyes look like? What is his tongue doing? What are his ears doing?
4. Write five adjectives that describe Annie. Write five adjectives that describe the Man with Big Boots.

Discussion point: How does the author show us what kind of person the Man with Big Boots is?

Discussion point: Do you think animals really can understand what people are saying to them?

THEMES

Animal abandonment/animal welfare

1. In groups, research an animal shelter and report back to the class. What kinds of animals do they care for? Do they encourage the public to adopt the animals?
2. Design a poster advertising an animal shelter. Include information about what they do and how people can help the animals at the shelter.

Discussion point: Do you think animal shelters might need the help of the general public to look after the animals they rescue? What kinds of things might the shelters need from the public? (money, blankets, etc.)

Discussion point: What reasons might someone have for deciding not to keep their pet anymore? If they had to give their pet away, what could they do to make sure the pet was well looked after when they gave it away?

Responsible pet ownership

1. As a class, make a list of what makes a good pet owner. What does a responsible pet owner need to do, be or have to take care of their pet? Think about the things Annie did and said to make Grover feel safe and loved.
2. As a class, make a list of questions to ask someone who has visited the animal shelter and would like to adopt Grover. Questions may cover things like how often Grover would need to be fed, whether he would like to be around people, what kind of bed he would sleep in, how often they would take him for a walk, etc. Then group children in pairs. Each child takes a turn of being the carer at the animal shelter, and asks the other child their list of questions to find out if they know how to look after a pet properly.

Discussion point: Why do you think some people get a pet if they don't really want to look after it properly?

Discussion point: What are some of the positives and negatives about owning a pet?

Empathy for animals

1. Grover is very nervous at the animal shelter – what does this feel like? In groups, each child takes a turn describing a time when they were scared about a new situation. What happened? Was the situation as bad as they thought? Or, like Grover, did they gradually become more comfortable?
2. Design a dog's dream house. Think about the things dogs love most, such as a comfortable bed, warmth, tasty food, safety, humans who love them.

Discussion point: What is empathy? How do we know that the vet and Annie have empathy for Grover?

Discussion point: Have you been in a situation when you have shown empathy for someone? How did you show empathy?

WRITING ACTIVITIES

- Write another chapter, following on from the last chapter of the book.
- Write the story from Annie's point of view.
- Write a newspaper advertisement for an animal shelter, letting people know the shelter has pets for sale.
- Write a book review for *Grover Finds a Home*.

Author Motivation

Claire Garth

I had the concept for the book back in July 2014, not long after Grover had come into our care. As he felt more at ease and settled into our home, his gorgeous nature blossomed. He quickly became the most affectionate dog – I was often in awe of how resilient he was. How he could learn to trust and love again after all he'd been through. I'm still in awe of that now.

The rescue industry was completely new to me when I commenced working at the Sydney Dogs & Cats Home – learning about the great work that organisations like the Sydney Dogs & Cats Home undertake was eye-opening. They do so much, with so little. It's the most passionate place I have ever worked.

In the animal welfare world, you often see the very worst in people, but you also get to see the absolute best. It's amazing to watch these loving creatures get a second chance – I truly believe they know just how lucky they are. You can see it in their eyes. There's nothing quite like the love of a rescue dog.

Grover's is a true story, and virtually all the events in the book reflect the reality of how he came to the shelter, was taken into our care as a foster dog and ultimately became a member of our family.

He comes with me to work most days and that's how he meets a number of the animals passing through.

Not long after he was picked up by rangers and brought to the shelter, Grover's former owner said he wanted him back. This was despite him admitting to severely neglecting him. When the judge ruled that Grover's owner was not fit to own an animal, it meant we could legally adopt him. (By this point, he had been living with us for about three months.) I was so relieved at this, I posted an overview of his rescue story on the Sydney Dogs & Cats Home Facebook page. It was incredibly well received and generated enough commentary that News Limited picked the story up and posted it on their news sites:

www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/from-ignored-to-adored-how-top-dog-grover-won-the-hearts-of-his-rescuers/story-fni0cx12-1227100771694

When News Limited contacted me, they talked about how the photos of Grover had made their way around the office and people were close to tears at his story. The

reader comments on the news article and on our Facebook post said similar things.

Seeing how people connected with his story – even when it was summarised into 150 words – made me realise that it was one worth telling, with some valuable themes underneath it.

Grover's story is a lesson in courage, resilience, and the beauty that lies in a second chance.

GROVER McBANE

RESCUE DOG



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CLAIRE GARTH is a former primary school teacher. She now works as the PR and Marketing Manager at the Sydney Dogs & Cats Home. Claire adopted the real Grover in 2013 and she and Grover work to raise awareness about animal rescue.



JOHANNES LEAK is an illustrator and commercial artist who specialises in cartooning, magazine illustration, music album artwork and storyboards. He lives and works on the NSW Central Coast, where he can also be spotted surfing and walking his dog, Calvin.

Grover is a brave dog, but right now he's scared. He's cold, wet and hungry and he doesn't know where the Animal Ranger is taking him.

After escaping from his owner's yard in a thunderstorm, Grover arrives at a local animal shelter. The people there seem kind, but Grover isn't sure he'll be allowed to stay. His owner doesn't seem to want him and Grover is scared to go back to the yard where he was chained up ...

What will happen to Grover?

Where will he go?

Reading age: 6–9

Subject: Fiction

ISBN: 9781863958134

RRP: \$12.99

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For all other enquiries, please contact Black Inc.
Level 1, 221 Drummond St, Carlton, Victoria 3053
Phone: +61 3 9486 0288 Fax +61 3 9011 6106
Email: enquiries@blackincbooks.com