

A Dog's Life



By

Ann M. Martin

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on two chapters of *A Dog's Life* and is comprised of five of the following activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include independence and survival, courage and persistence, loyalty and friendship.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *anagrams*
7. Listing compound words
8. Identifying parts of speech
9. Identify *personification*.
10. Identification of root words

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Complete a Plot Outline for a Sequel
5. Identify the climax of the novel.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

Squirrel is not like most dogs. Born a stray, she must make her own way in the world, facing busy highways, changing seasons, and humans both gentle and brutal. Her life story, in her own words, is marked by loss, but also by an inspiring instinct to survive. And when it seems she will roam the woods and country roads alone forever, Squirrel makes two friends who, in very different ways, define her fate.

At once heartrending and hopeful, Ann Martin's exquisite story of a dog's life is told with her trademark grace and insight. [Courtesy of The Publisher]

Author Biography

Ann M. Martin

Ann Martin grew up in Princeton, New Jersey. She developed an interest in writing at an early age and would even dictate stories for her mother to write down. She graduated from Smith College and became an editor of children's books. Now she devotes her time to writing full-time. Ann wrote her first 35 books in the popular **The Baby-Sitter's Club** series but since then has concentrated on writing single novels. Her acclaimed novel, **A Corner of the Universe** won a Newbery Honor in 2003. She also wrote the very popular **The Doll People** (2000). Presently Ann lives in the Hudson Valley of upstate New York.



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Name: _____

A Dog's Life

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1. Night. 2. The House in the Country.



Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *A Dog's Life* is Squirrel, a stray dog. Having an animal as the protagonist of a story is usual, yet some of the best-loved stories in the world feature dogs, cats, and horses as their main character. What are some books or movies that you have read or know of that feature an animal as the protagonist? Which was your favorite?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

concentrating	litters	utility	unsanitary
investigate	sporadically	predators	kits

1. A possum went in and out of the _____ room.
2. My father went downstairs to _____ the mysterious noise.
3. We only heard the strange squeaking sound _____ during our trip to town.
4. The fox's warren contained four newborn _____.
5. I was _____ with all might on getting my lines right.
6. The moose has very few natural _____.
7. Human children are generally not born in _____, but one or two at a time.
8. Eating off the floor is considered to be _____.

Questions



1. What is the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One (*Night*)?

2. Squirrel states at the conclusion of the first chapter, *I've been all these dogs*. What did she mean by this?

3. Squirrel was born in an old garden _____ on property owned by the _____ family.

4. What was there about Matthias that appealed to Squirrel?

5. This story is told from a first-person perspective. Whose perspective is this? Why is this a bit unusual?

6. Squirrel states that her mother was looking for a place that was safe from predators. What animals in the northern United States do you think would be a dog's predator?

Language Activities



A. Onomatopoeia is a literary device defined as a word, which imitates the natural sounds of a thing. Examples of this are found in the second chapter: *Hsss! Pttt!* (The sounds of a cat.) Think of examples of this device for the following:

A punch on the nose.	
A book toppling from a shelf onto the floor.	
Your choice: -----	

B. Personification is giving human qualities to something that is not human. The following is an example from Chapter Two: *Even in early spring, as winter faded...*

Describe how winter is personified in this sentence..

Create your own example of personification.

As you continue to read through the novel be on the lookout for other examples of this literary device. If you should find one, come back to this question and enter it below.

C. Anagrams

An **anagram** is a word that is formed by changing the order of the letters of another word. For example, the letters in the word **WAS** can also form the word **SAW**. Follow these directions to form the anagrams:



a) read the clue in the right-hand column.

b) Using the word in the left-hand column move the letters around in any order, but you must use all the letters. All of the words in the left-hand column can be found in the first two chapters of *A Dog's Life*.

Word	Anagram	Clue
stone		Passing is important – but not these, please.
silent		Heed.
parents		Snares.
life		A raspy kind of tool.
stray		Lots in most cafeterias.
straw		Skin blemish.
asleep		I beg of you!

D. Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here is such an example from Chapter Two: ... when night **p**assed **p**acefully.

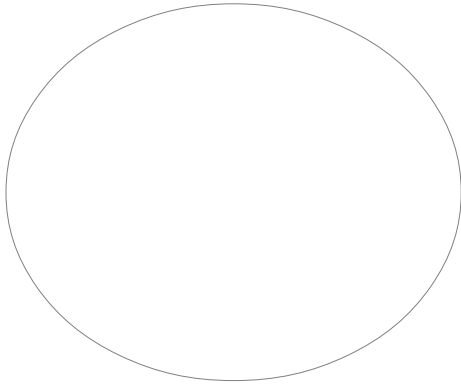


Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

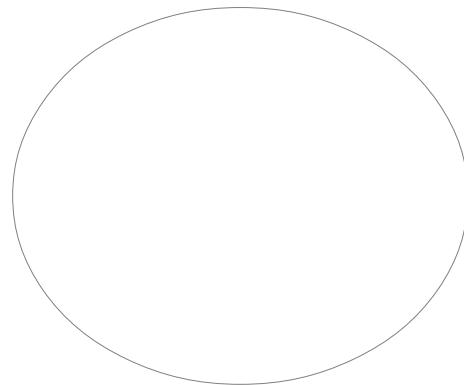
A thunderstorm.	
A loud burp.	
Your choice.	

E. 5 Ws and an H.

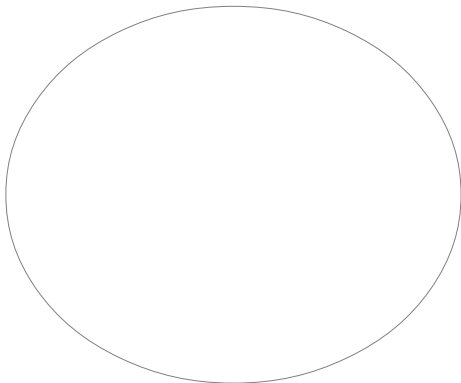
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



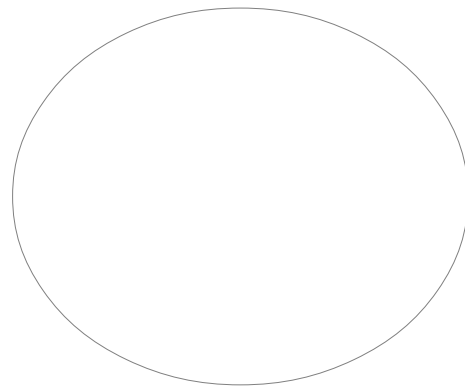
WHO?



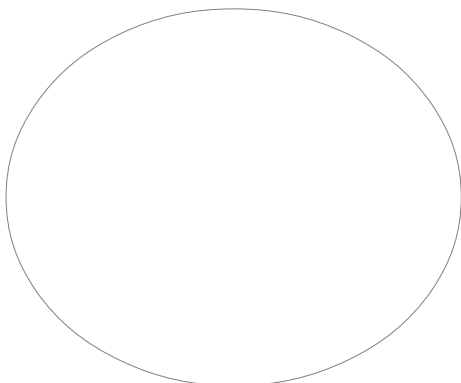
WHAT?



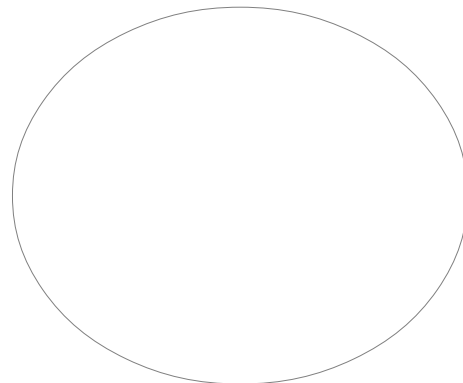
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

F. An Acrostic Poem

There are many forms of poetry available to the aspiring poet other than the rhyming poem. An ACROSTIC poem is one example. In an acrostic poem the first letters of each line are aligned vertically to form a word. The word often is the subject of the poem. Here is an example written by the acclaimed poet, Atrocious Halitosis:

The Firefly

Freaky-looking
Itches me when I touch
Restless at night
Early or late
Fearless
Little
Yellowfly



The Acrostic Poem

Now create your own Acrostic Poem on a subject featured in this novel. Your poem must have at least four lines (and doesn't need to rhyme).

Title:

Extension Activity



A. Picture's Worth a Thousand Words



Use the three boxes to describe and illustrate the beginning, middle and end of the second chapter.

Beginning Picture:	Beginning:
Middle Picture:	Middle:
Concluding Picture:	Concluding: