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"Dogtown" Lesson Plan Guide

by Katherine Applegate and Gennifer Choldenko

Unit Overview

Duration: 2-3 weeks

Grade Level: 3-5

Subject Integration: ELA, Science, Social Studies, Art

Essential Question: What does it mean to find home and belonging?

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify and analyze character motivations and development
- Compare and contrast different types of characters (traditional vs. technological)
- Examine themes of friendship, belonging, and kindness in literature
- Make text-to-self and text-to-world connections
- Express understanding through multiple formats (writing, discussion, creative projects)

Standards Alignment

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3:** Describe characters, settings, and events using details from the text
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.6:** Compare and contrast point of view from which stories are narrated
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1:** Engage effectively in collaborative discussions
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1:** Write opinion pieces supporting a point of view with reasons

WEEK 1: Introduction and Beginning Chapters

Day 1: Book Introduction and Pre-Reading

Objective: Activate prior knowledge and build anticipation

Materials: Book covers, chart paper, sticky notes

Opening (10 minutes)

- Display book cover and read title/author names
- Quick-write: "What do you think this book will be about?"

Main Activity (25 minutes)

1. **Vocabulary Preview** (10 minutes)
 - Introduce key terms: shelter, robot, forever home, loyalty, adventure
 - Students create vocabulary cards with illustrations



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2. Prediction Activity (15 minutes)

- Read book summary aloud
- Students make predictions using "I think... because..." stems
- Create class prediction chart

Closing (10 minutes)

- Share one prediction with a partner
- Assign reading: Chapters 1-2

Assessment: Prediction chart participation, vocabulary card completion

Day 2: Character Introduction

Objective: Analyze initial character traits and motivations

Materials: Character analysis worksheet, text

Opening (5 minutes)

- Partner share: What did you learn about the main characters?

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. Character Deep Dive (20 minutes)

- Introduce Metal Head and Chance comparison chart
- Students work in pairs to identify character traits with text evidence
- Focus questions:
 - What does each character want most?
 - What are their biggest challenges?
 - How are they similar/different?

2. Discussion Circle (10 minutes)

- Share findings with larger group
- Address question: "Is Metal Head as 'real' as Chance?"

Closing (10 minutes)

- Exit ticket: "What makes someone a good friend?"

Homework: Read Chapters 3-4

Assessment: Character chart accuracy, participation in discussion

Day 3: The Journey Begins

Objective: Track plot development and identify themes

Materials: Journey map template, colored pencils

Opening (10 minutes)

- Quick discussion: Why do the dogs decide to leave Dogtown?



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Main Activity (25 minutes)

1. **Journey Mapping** (15 minutes)
 - Students begin visual map of the dogs' adventure
 - Mark starting point, first obstacles, and goals
 - Include both plot events and emotional journey
2. **Theme Spotting** (10 minutes)
 - Introduce theme tracking sheet
 - Identify examples of: courage, friendship, kindness
 - Students find one example of each from assigned reading

Closing (10 minutes)

- Gallery walk of journey maps in progress
- Preview next reading assignment

Homework: Read Chapters 5-6

Assessment: Journey map details, theme examples with page numbers

Days 4-5: Continue Reading and Analysis

Objective: Deepen comprehension through discussion and response

Materials: Discussion question cards, response journals

Structure for Each Day:

- **Opening** (10 min): Reading response journal sharing
- **Main Activity** (25 min): Literature circles with rotating roles (Discussion Director, Vocabulary Enricher, Connector, Illustrator)
- **Closing** (10 min): Whole group share-out of key insights

Reading Assignments: Continue through middle chapters **Assessment:** Journal entries, literature circle role sheets

WEEK 2: Middle Chapters and Theme Development

Day 6: Acts of Kindness Focus

Objective: Analyze how kindness impacts the story

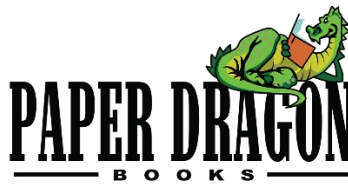
Materials: Kindness tracker, sticky notes

Opening (5 minutes)

- Think-pair-share: "Describe an unexpected kindness from the story"

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Kindness Investigation** (20 minutes)
 - Students work in small groups to catalog acts of kindness



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- Create categories: kindness from strangers, kindness between friends, small acts vs. big acts
 - Discussion: How do these acts change the story?
2. **Real-World Connections** (10 minutes)
- Students share examples of unexpected kindness they've experienced
 - Connect to current events or community examples

Closing (10 minutes)

- Class creates "Kindness Matters" poster for classroom

Assessment: Group kindness catalog, personal connection quality

Day 7: Technology and Friendship Theme

Objective: Examine the role of technology in relationships

Materials: Venn diagram worksheet, discussion prompts

Opening (10 minutes)

- Poll students: "Can robots be real friends? Why or why not?"

Main Activity (25 minutes)

1. **Metal Head Analysis** (15 minutes)
- Venn diagram: Metal Head vs. traditional pets
 - Evidence gathering: What makes Metal Head "real"?
 - Partner discussion: Does it matter that he's artificial?
2. **Debate Preparation** (10 minutes)
- Divide class into two sides: "Robot pets are real friends" vs. "Only living animals can be true companions"
 - Students gather evidence from text

Closing (10 minutes)

- Mini-debate with structured format
- Students can change sides if convinced by evidence

Homework: Read assigned chapters, find more evidence for debate position

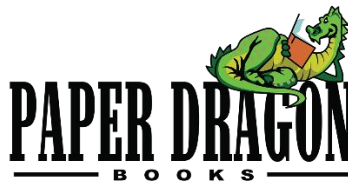
Assessment: Venn diagram completion, quality of debate evidence

Days 8-9: Approaching the Climax

Objective: Predict outcomes and analyze character growth

Follow similar structure to Days 4-5 with focus on:

- Character development tracking
- Prediction refinement



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- Identifying story's turning points
- Discussing how challenges change the characters

WEEK 3: Resolution and Extension Activities

Day 10: Story Conclusion Discussion

Objective: Analyze resolution and character arcs

Materials: Before/after character charts, discussion questions

Opening (10 minutes)

- Students complete reading independently or in pairs
- Initial reactions sharing

Main Activity (30 minutes)

1. **Character Growth Analysis** (15 minutes)
 - Complete before/after charts for both dogs
 - Focus on: What did each character learn about home and belonging?
2. **Resolution Discussion** (15 minutes)
 - Guided discussion questions:
 - Were you satisfied with the ending? Why?
 - What does "home" mean to each character now?
 - How did their friendship change them?
 - What was the most important lesson in the story?

Closing (5 minutes)

- Exit ticket: One-sentence summary of the book's main message

Assessment: Character growth analysis, discussion participation

Day 11: Creative Response Projects

Objective: Demonstrate understanding through creative expression

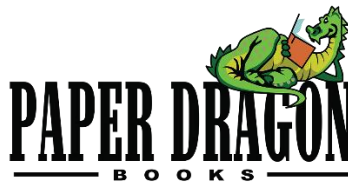
Materials: Various art supplies, project option sheets

Project Options:

1. **Alternative Ending:** Write and illustrate a different conclusion
2. **Character Interview:** Script and perform interview with Metal Head or Chance
3. **Sequel Planning:** Outline the dogs' next adventure
4. **Public Service Announcement:** Create PSA about animal shelters or kindness
5. **Robot Design:** Design improvements for Metal Head with explanations

Structure:

- **Opening** (5 min): Project explanation and choice



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- **Work Time** (35 min): Independent or partner project work
- **Closing** (5 min): Progress check and preview of presentation day

Assessment: Project rubric focusing on creativity, accuracy, and effort

Day 12: Project Presentations and Unit Wrap-Up

Objective: Share learning and reflect on themes

Materials: Presentation schedule, reflection sheets

Opening (10 minutes)

- Review presentation expectations and audience guidelines

Main Activity (30 minutes)

- Student presentations (3-4 minutes each)
- Audience provides positive feedback using "I liked..." stems

Closing (5 minutes)

- Unit reflection: What will you remember most about this book?
- Preview connection to next unit or independent reading suggestions

Assessment: Presentation rubric, unit reflection quality

Assessment Rubric

Reading Comprehension (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Demonstrates deep understanding with rich text support
- **Meets:** Shows solid comprehension with adequate evidence
- **Approaching:** Basic understanding with minimal support
- **Below:** Limited comprehension evident

Character Analysis (25%)

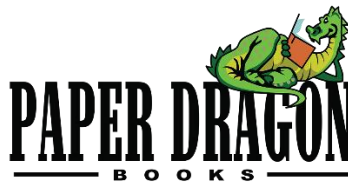
- **Exceeds:** Insightful analysis of character motivation and growth
- **Meets:** Clear understanding of character development
- **Approaching:** Basic character identification
- **Below:** Minimal character understanding

Theme Recognition (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Identifies and analyzes multiple themes with connections
- **Meets:** Recognizes main themes with some analysis
- **Approaching:** Identifies basic themes
- **Below:** Limited theme recognition

Participation and Engagement (25%)

- **Exceeds:** Consistently contributes meaningfully to discussions



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- **Meets:** Regular, appropriate participation
- **Approaching:** Some participation with prompting
- **Below:** Minimal participation

Differentiation Strategies

For Struggling Readers:

- Audio book support available
- Graphic organizers provided
- Partner reading opportunities
- Modified writing assignments with sentence starters

For Advanced Readers:

- Independent research projects on robotics/AI
- Leadership roles in literature circles
- Extended writing assignments
- Cross-curricular connections to science and ethics

For English Language Learners:

- Visual vocabulary supports
- Collaborative group work
- First language discussion opportunities
- Picture-supported comprehension activities

Materials List

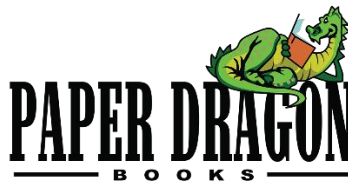
- Class set of "Dogtown"
- Chart paper and markers
- Sticky notes
- Index cards for vocabulary
- Art supplies for projects
- Digital presentation tools (optional)

Extension Activities

Home Connections:

- Family discussion guide sent home
- Optional family visit to local animal shelter
- Read-aloud suggestions for families

Community Service:



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- Organize classroom supply drive for local animal shelter
- Write thank-you notes to shelter volunteers
- Create awareness campaign about pet adoption

Technology Integration:

- Research real robot dogs online
- Create digital presentations
- Use online discussion boards for literature circles