

Email: bridget@paperdragonreads.com Phone: (407) 212-7759

Family Discussion Guide for "Dogtown"

Conversation starters for parents and children

Getting Started

What This Book Is About

"Dogtown" tells the story of Metal Head, a robot dog who wants to return to his original family, and Chance, a shelter dog who decides to accompany him on this journey. As they travel together, they encounter both challenges and unexpected acts of kindness from strangers. The story explores what it means to find your "forever home" and raises thoughtful questions about friendship, belonging, and what makes someone "real" or worthy of love.

Key Themes Your Child Will Encounter:

- **Finding where you belong:** Both dogs are searching for their place in the world
- **True friendship:** How we support each other, even when it's difficult or scary
- **Kindness from strangers:** How small acts of care can make a big difference
- **What makes someone "real":** Whether being artificial makes Metal Head less deserving of love and friendship
- **Home vs. house:** The difference between a physical place and where you feel you truly belong
- **Courage and loyalty:** How we find bravery when helping those we care about

Tip for Parents: Choose 2-3 questions per conversation rather than overwhelming with too many. Let your child's interests guide which topics to explore deeper.

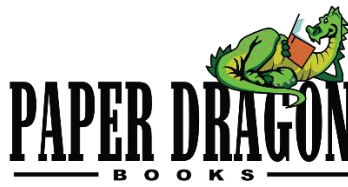
Character Connection Questions

About the Dogs

- Which dog do you relate to more - Metal Head or Chance? Why?
- What do you think makes Metal Head special, even though he's a robot?
- Why do you think Chance decided to help Metal Head instead of staying safely at the shelter?
- If you met these dogs, what would you want to say to them?

Friendship Focus

- What makes Metal Head and Chance good friends to each other?
- Have you ever done something brave to help a friend? Tell me about it.
- How do the dogs take care of each other during their adventure?



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- What would you do if your friend wanted to do something that seemed scary or dangerous?

Big Ideas to Explore

What Makes a Home?

- Metal Head is looking for his "home" - what do you think makes a place feel like home?
- Do you think home is more about the place or the people (or dogs) you're with?
- How is our family home similar to or different from what the dogs are looking for?
- What makes you feel most at home?

Technology and Relationships

- Do you think Metal Head has real feelings? What makes you think so?
- If you could have a robot pet like Metal Head, would you want one? Why?
- What's the difference between Metal Head and a toy robot?
- Do you think robots can be part of families?

Fun Conversation Starters

Imagination Questions

- If you could design upgrades for Metal Head, what would you add?
- What do you think the dogs' next adventure might be?
- If you wrote a letter to the authors, what would you tell them about the story?
- Which scene from the book would make the best movie scene?

Personal Connections

- Have you ever felt like you didn't belong somewhere? How did that feel?
- What's the bravest thing you've ever done?
- If you had to leave home on an adventure, what would you pack?
- Who in your life is like Chance - always ready to help a friend?

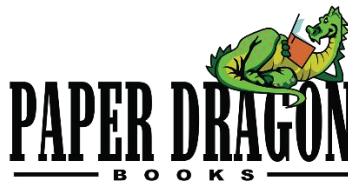
Discussion Activities

Compare and Connect

- How is this book similar to other stories we've read together?
- Do any of the characters remind you of people or pets we know?
- What other books about friendship should we read next?

Real-World Thinking

- Should we visit an animal shelter to learn more about how they help pets?
- What could our family do to help animals in our community?



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- How do you think real animal shelters are similar to or different from Dogtown?

Conversation Tips for Parents

Creating Safe Spaces

- **Listen without immediately jumping to lessons** - let your child share their thoughts first
- **Ask "What do you think?" rather than "What's the right answer?"**
- **Share your own reactions** - it's okay to say "That part made me worried too"
- **Follow your child's interests** - if they're fascinated by the robot aspect, explore that more

Encouraging Deep Thinking

- **Ask follow-up questions:** "What makes you say that?" or "Can you tell me more?"
- **Connect to their world:** "How is that like something in your life?"
- **Wonder together:** "I wonder why the author chose to..." or "What do you think would happen if...?"

Making It Personal

- **Share your own stories** about friendship, belonging, or times you've been brave
- **Connect to family values:** "This reminds me of how our family believes..."
- **Plan related activities:** visit a shelter, do a kind act together, read more books by these authors

Questions by Age Group

For Younger Readers (Ages 6-8)

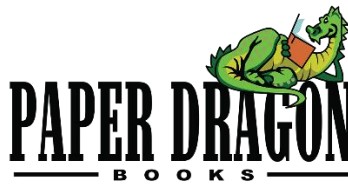
Focus on concrete story elements and personal connections:

- What was your favorite part?
- Which dog would you want to be friends with?
- What would you do if you found a lost pet?
- How do the dogs help each other?

For Older Readers (Ages 9-12)

Explore deeper themes and ethical questions:

- What does the story teach us about judging others?
- How do Metal Head's and Chance's different backgrounds affect their friendship?
- What responsibilities do we have to help others find where they belong?
- How does technology change relationships in the story?



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Remember

The best family discussions about books happen naturally, over time, and when children feel heard and valued. Use these questions as starting points, but let your child's curiosity and connections guide the conversation. The goal is to share the joy of reading together and explore the meaningful themes that make "Dogtown" such a special story.