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"Dog Trouble" Lesson Plan Guide

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Unit Overview

Duration: 1 week

Grade Level: 6–8

Subject Integration: ELA, Social-Emotional Learning, Science

Essential Question: *What does genuine accountability look like, and what can unexpected responsibility teach us about who we want to be?*

Learning Objectives — Students will be able to:

- Analyze how setting functions as a catalyst for character change in "Dog Trouble"
 - Explore themes of accountability, consequence, and the difference between punishment and genuine growth
 - Examine the human-animal bond as a narrative device and emotional catalyst
 - Connect the story's themes to personal experiences of responsibility and change
 - Express understanding through analytical and creative writing
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ONE-WEEK LESSON PLAN

Day 1: Meet Ash — Character Introduction and Context

Objective: Establish Ash's situation, the choices that led him here, and the world of Ferncliff Island

Materials: Book, character context chart

Opening (10 min):

- Quick-write: "Describe a time when you had to do something you didn't want to do—and what happened when you did it anyway."
- Partner share

Main Activity (35 min):

- Introduce Ash: Who is he? What has he done? What is the gap between "good kid at heart" and his recent choices?
- Map the chain of consequences: grades → vandalism → island → shelter
- Discuss: Is Ferncliff Island a punishment, an opportunity, or both? Who gets to decide?
- Introduce Ferncliff Island as a setting: What does isolation from your old environment do to your ability to change?

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What do you think Ash needs most right now—and is he getting it?"

Assessment: Character analysis, cause-and-effect understanding, engagement with central question

Day 2: Enter Cooper — The Human-Animal Bond

Objective: Analyze what Cooper offers Ash and why it matters more than lectures or punishment

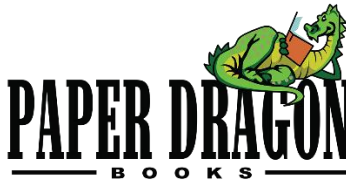
Materials: Book, human-animal bond discussion materials

Opening (10 min):

- Think-pair-share: "Has a pet or animal ever helped you through something hard? What did it offer that a person couldn't?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Read and discuss the chapters introducing Cooper: What is Ash's initial reaction? What cracks his resistance?



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- Explore the human-animal bond scientifically: What do we know about how animals affect human mood, behavior, and sense of responsibility?
- Discuss: Why might Cooper's uncomplicated acceptance reach Ash when adult authority figures haven't?
- Character analysis: Track the specific moments when Ash begins to change—what triggers each shift?

Closing (5 min):

- Quick-write: "What does Cooper see in Ash that Ash doesn't yet see in himself?"

Assessment: Character development tracking, human-animal bond understanding, analytical writing

Day 3: Accountability — Punishment vs. Genuine Change

Objective: Examine the distinction between serving consequences and genuinely taking responsibility

Materials: Book, accountability analysis chart, optional restorative justice reading

Opening (10 min):

- Discussion: "What's the difference between doing your time and actually changing? Can you tell them apart from the outside?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Map Ash's arc: At what points is he just enduring vs. actually growing? What marks the difference?
- Introduce the concept of restorative justice: How does it differ from punitive approaches? Which does the shelter represent?
- Analyze the shelter community: How does belonging to something create accountability in a way that isolation doesn't?
- Writing prompt: "What would Ash say about accountability at the beginning of the book vs. now? Write both versions."

Closing (5 min):

- Share one sentence: "Genuine accountability looks like ___ in this story."

Assessment: Accountability concept analysis, character arc synthesis, writing quality

Day 4: Setting and Identity — What Ferncliff Island Makes Possible

Objective: Analyze how the island setting creates the conditions for Ash's growth

Materials: Book, setting analysis worksheet

Opening (10 min):

- Partner discussion: "Why does Ash need to be removed from his old environment? Could he have changed without leaving?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Setting analysis: Map the specific features of Ferncliff Island that contribute to Ash's transformation (isolation, nature, small community, animals)
- Discuss: What does Ash's city environment enable that Ferncliff doesn't—and vice versa?
- Connect to theme: What does the story say about the relationship between environment and identity?
- Big question discussion: "If you needed to become a different version of yourself, what would your environment need to look like?"

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What does Ferncliff Island make possible for Ash that his city life couldn't?"

Assessment: Setting analysis, thematic connection, personal reflection

Day 5: Final Synthesis and Creative Response

Objective: Synthesize the novel's themes through analytical or creative writing

Materials: Writing materials, project choice cards

Opening (10 min):

- Preview project options; students select and begin

Main Activity (35 min):



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- Option A: Write an analytical paragraph — "How does Cooper function as a narrative device for Ash's transformation?"
- Option B: Write a letter from Ash to the building he vandalized—what does he actually want to say?
- Option C: Write the scene where Ash says goodbye to Cooper—what has he learned, and can he put it into words?
- Share work in pairs or with the class

Closing (5 min):

- Class closing: "One thing 'Dog Trouble' made me think about accountability differently is..."

Assessment: Writing quality, thematic synthesis, personal meaning-making

Differentiation

- **Advanced learners:** Research restorative justice practices and write a proposal for how they might apply in a school setting
 - **Students needing support:** Graphic organizers for character arc and cause-and-effect tracking; sentence starters for writing tasks
 - **English Language Learners:** Visual character timeline; collaborative discussion and writing options; pre-teach accountability vocabulary
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Materials List

- Class set of "Dog Trouble"
- Character context chart (Day 1)
- Brief reading on the human-animal bond for Day 2
- Optional brief reading on restorative justice for Day 3
- Setting analysis worksheet (Day 4)
- Writing materials and project choice cards (Day 5)