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"Forever Ripley" Lesson Plan Guide

by McCall Hoyle

Unit Overview

Duration: 1 week

Grade Level: 3–5

Subject Integration: ELA, Science, Social-Emotional Learning

Essential Question: How do we carry the love of those we've lost, and what does loyalty look like when it asks everything of us?

Learning Objectives — Students will be able to:

- Analyze how an animal narrator creates empathy and fresh perspective
- Explore themes of grief, loyalty, memory, and the human-animal bond
- Understand how dogs communicate love and connection without words
- Express understanding through creative and reflective projects

ONE-WEEK LESSON PLAN

Day 1: Ripley's World—Seeing Through a Dog's Eyes

Objective: Introduce the animal narrator and build engagement with Ripley's perspective

Materials: Book, discussion prompts about pets and animal communication

Opening (10 min):

- Quick-write: "If your pet (or a pet you've known) could talk, what would they say about your family?"
- Share out—celebrate the humor and insight students imagine

Main Activity (35 min):

- Introduce Ripley: a German Shepherd, a working dog, fiercely devoted to her handler Max
- Discuss what an animal narrator can and can't understand—where does this create humor? Heartbreak?
- Read opening pages together; notice how Ripley experiences the world (scent, loyalty, feeling)
- Introduce Max's dying wish: "Take care of my girls." Ask: "What does this mean for a dog who can't speak?"

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What do you think will be hardest about Ripley's job?"

Assessment: Narrator perspective understanding, empathy with character, engagement with premise

Day 2: Grief Through Different Eyes

Objective: Explore how grief looks through Ripley's animal perspective vs. Charlie's human one

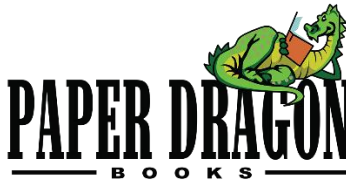
Materials: Grief comparison chart, selected story passages

Opening (10 min):

- Think-pair-share: "How do you think a dog knows when someone is sad?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Read/discuss a passage showing Ripley's grief for Max—what does she notice? What confuses her?



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- Compare: How might Charlie grieve differently? Create a simple T-chart together
- Discuss: What does Ripley offer Charlie that words can't? (Presence, warmth, consistency)
- Connect to science: What do we know about dogs' emotional intelligence and ability to sense human feelings?

Closing (5 min):

- Exit ticket: "What does Ripley's grief tell us about how much animals can love?"

Assessment: Perspective analysis, empathy for varied grief responses, science connection

Day 3: Loyalty and the Cost of a Promise

Objective: Analyze loyalty as the story's core theme and what it demands of Ripley

Materials: Loyalty discussion prompts, relationship map graphic organizer

Opening (10 min):

- Quick-write: "Describe the most loyal thing you've ever seen—a person or an animal."

Main Activity (35 min):

- Map the relationships: Ripley → Max → Charlie — trace how love flows between all three
- Discuss: What does Ripley sacrifice or endure to keep her promise?
- Big question: "Is loyalty always worth the cost? What does Ripley's story suggest?"
- Connect to students: "Has anyone ever kept a hard promise? What did it cost you? Was it worth it?"

Closing (5 min):

- Partner share: "Define loyalty in one sentence, using Ripley as your example."

Assessment: Theme analysis, moral reasoning, personal connection

Day 4: Memory as a Gift We Give Each Other

Objective: Examine how memories of Max guide Ripley and sustain Charlie

Materials: Memory discussion prompts, story passages on memory and presence

Opening (10 min):

- Discussion: "What's a memory of someone you love that always makes you feel better?"

Main Activity (35 min):

- Identify moments where Ripley's memories of Max guide her actions in the present
- Discuss: What does the story say about how people (and animals) carry loved ones with them after loss?
- Theme synthesis: "Friendships and making memories help us through even the hardest times." Do you agree? Why?
- Students write: "One memory I would never want to forget is ___ because ___."

Closing (5 min):

- Share one sentence from their memory writing

Assessment: Theme synthesis, memory as narrative device, personal writing

Day 5: Creative Project and Celebration

Objective: Express understanding of loyalty, love, and memory through a creative response

Materials: Writing materials, art supplies, presentation space

Opening (10 min):

- Preview project options and select

Main Activity (35 min):

- Option A: Write a letter from Ripley to Max, telling him how she is taking care of his girls
- Option B: Write a day in your pet's life from their point of view—what do they notice? What do they love?



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- Option C: Create a "Memory Map" of important moments shared between Ripley, Max, and Charlie
- Share projects with a partner or small group

Closing (5 min):

- Class closing: "One thing Ripley taught me about love is..."
- Note for teachers: If students surface personal grief, validate and connect to school counselor as needed

Assessment: Creative expression, personal meaning synthesis, emotional processing

Differentiation

- **Advanced learners:** Research working dog roles (therapy, service, military) and present to the class
 - **Students needing support:** Graphic organizers for character relationships; sentence starters for writing
 - **Students who have experienced loss:** Prepare for personal feelings to surface; coordinate with school counselor as needed
 - **English Language Learners:** Pre-teach vocabulary for emotions and animal behavior; collaborative discussion options
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Materials List

- Class set of "Forever Ripley"
- Relationship map graphic organizer
- Brief reference on German Shepherds as working dogs
- Memory writing prompt cards
- Art supplies and writing materials for Day 5
- School counselor contact (for sensitive moments)