

BIG DOG



by Libby Gleeson
illustrated by Armin Greder

TEACHING NOTES
prepared by Louise Park

Introducing the book

Display the cover and encourage the children to contemplate the title and to look closely at the cover illustrations. Lead questions might include:

- Who do you think might be under the mask?
- Which of the two characters looks the scariest, the dog or the masked creature?
- What do you think the dog might be feeling?
- What sort of dog might Big Dog be?
- Why has Armin Greder made Big Dog smaller than the masked monster?

Reading the book

There is no set way to read a book—the children's enjoyment of and involvement in the story are your only guides. The following is one approach you might use.

Read *Big Dog* slowly, allowing the suspense of the story to build. After reading Jen's family's suggestions on what she should do about her fear of Big Dog, pause. Invite the children to offer ideas as to what they might do in that situation. Ask them to recall the cover illustration and to predict what might happen next.

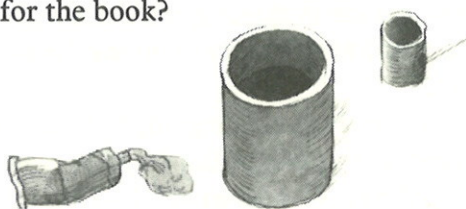
Reread the story without interruption, allowing plenty of time for the children to absorb the illustrations.

Sharing the story

In *Big Dog*, Libby Gleeson explores a small child's fear and confrontation of that fear. Children and adults alike will be able to relate to this experience, whether it be their fear of dogs, darkened bedrooms at night or first days at school. After rereading the story, you will find the children bursting to share fearful experiences with the class. Through discussion, encourage them to realise that the characters in *Big Dog* were able to solve problems for themselves. It might be interesting to take this concept one step further by talking about the difference between this sort of problem and a situation in which one should ask for help.

Questions for discussion might include:

- Who is telling this story? How do you think they feel towards Big Dog?
- Did you feel that to frighten Big Dog with the mask was a good idea?
- What would you have done if you had come face to face with Big Dog on the pathway?
- Does Big Dog look scary to you?
- Throughout the book, Armin Greder has drawn Big Dog's mouth open and happy. Do you think there is a reason for that?
- Does Big Dog seem put off by the masked monster at first?
- What might have happened had the dog not been friendly towards the masked creature?
- Can you think of another title for the book?



Exploring genre

Questions to explore genre include:

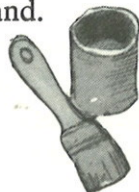
- Do you think this is a true story? Why?
- How would you describe the story's ending?
- Is the writer trying to tell us something through this story? What?
- Can you think of other books which remind you of this book in some way? How are they similar?
- Could this occur in your life?

Compare this book to non-fiction titles on dogs or mask making. Encourage children to express the ways in which they differ.

Language appreciation

There are many simple language and writing activities which stem naturally from this story. Some of the following may be suitable for your class.

- Bring in a dog basket filled with various dog items to discuss with the class. Some objects to consider: a bone, empty dog-food containers, a collar, flea rinse, a lead. You might cover the basket with a sheet and invite children to feel and identify the various items.
- Ask the children to cut out pictures of dogs to use in a class collage.
- Mount on sticks pictures of dogs to make puppets and write corresponding stories or plays.
- Compile a class list of alternative strategies the children in the book might have used to relieve Jen's fears.
- Make two wanted posters—one depicting Big Dog as scary and the other friendly.
- Invite the children to write alternative endings for the story.
- Have the children draft two illustrated advertisements for a local newspaper—one advertising for a watchdog and the other for a family pet.
- Write a class letter to an animal welfare organisation or a local vet inviting them to come to your classroom to talk about dogs.
- Ask the children to imagine they are the makers of special types of dog food which, when eaten, will stop dogs barking and instantly make them friendly. Have them design the packaging for their products. Bring in commercial products to show to the class beforehand.



Investigation and research

- Make a graph of class pets, using paw prints.
- Interview pet owners, asking them what they would do in the situation described in *Big Dog*.
- Research pedigree dogs in the library and compile data sheets.
- Compile lists of dogs, with personality files and comments as to their suitability as family pets.
- Investigate dog foods to find out which is the most nutritious, the cheapest, best value for money.

Music and drama

- Learn songs such as 'How much is that doggie in the window'.
- Perform dog movements to music using galloping, jumping, waddling, running, tail wagging, fast and slow motions.
- Write a percussion score depicting: the children approaching quietly, the dog barking and the children's reaction.
- Make dog masks from paper plates and use them to perform creative dances depicting Big Dog's possible reactions to the masked creature: fear, friendliness and anger.
- Mime the story.

Art and craft activities

Paper bag pups

What you need

two brown paper bags per child
construction paper
string
stapler
paste
collage materials (optional)
newspaper

What to do

- 1 Stuff the bags with crumpled newspaper and tie in a bunch at the top.
- 2 Attach the bags one on top of the other, so that you have a bag for the body and one for the head.
- 3 Use construction materials to make a collar for the middle, a tail, ears and facial features.
- 4 Paste these onto the bags and give the dog a name.

Scary masks

What you need

cereal boxes/large bags/cardboard and the like
collage materials
PVA glue
stapler
scissors
tape

What to do

- 1 Decide on the type of mask you wish to make to protect you from a dog.
- 2 Cut out the basic frame to the size of your face and head.
- 3 Use the collage materials to embellish it. Fabric remnant warehouses are excellent sources for fabric scraps such as fur and lambswool.

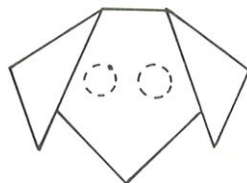
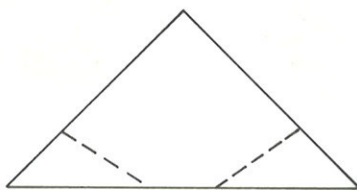
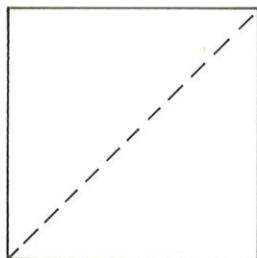
Origami dog mask

What you need

large, square sheets of paper
hat elastic or string
scissors
paste
tape
construction paper

What to do

- 1 Fold the paper diagonally.



- 2 Fold the corners in to form the ears.
- 3 Carefully cut out holes for the eyes.
- 4 Use the construction paper to create a nose and mouth for the dog.
- 5 Attach hat elastic or string.

Textured dog

What you need

template of a dog
shaving brushes/sticks/dish mops/brushes
paint
scissors

What to do

- 1 Cut out around the dog and decide on the type of fur it will have.
- 2 Paint the dog, using shaving brushes dipped into paint for a furry, fluffy dog or sticks for a more coarse style of fur.

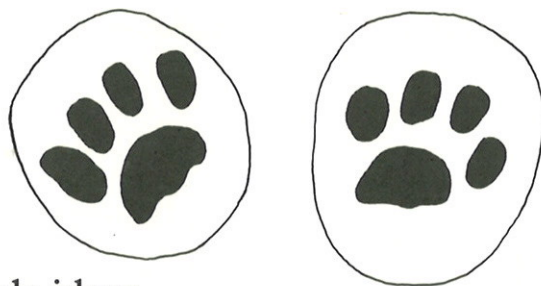
Potato paw-prints

What you need

potatoes
cutting implements
sponges
paint
paper

What to do

- 1 Cut the potato in half.
- 2 Carve paw prints carefully into the flat surface of the potato.
- 3 Dip the sponge into the paint.
- 4 Coat the potato paw-print surface with paint by pressing it into the sponge.
- 5 Use the potato as a stamp to make paw prints on the paper.



Other simple ideas

- Design a dream kennel for Big Dog.
- Design and construct dog food packets for Big Dog dog food.
- Make a class Big Book of the story, using an alternative ending.
- Use modelling dough to make different breeds of dogs or the characters in this book.
- Bake some edible dog biscuits.

Useful recipes

Playdough

What you need

- 6 cups plain flour
- 3 tablespoons alum
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 3 cups salt
- 1 teaspoon food colouring to six cups boiling water

What to do

- 1 Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl.
- 2 Turn onto table and knead well.

Edible biscuit dough

What you need

- 500 g butter
- 2 teaspoons vanilla essence
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 6 eggs
- 8–10 cups flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder

What to do

- 1 Combine all ingredients well.
- 2 Knead and roll out for cutting.

Finger paint

What you need

- ½ cup cornflour
- 1 litre boiling water
- 2 tablespoons glycerine
- powder paint

What to do

- 1 Dissolve the starch in a little cold water.
- 2 Add boiling water gradually while stirring.
- 3 When clear, add glycerine to keep the paint moist.
- 4 Add powder paint for colour and store in an airtight container.

Related literature

Other stories which express children's fears include:

Quincy by Ian Trevaskis (Ashton Scholastic)

Franklin in the dark by Paulette Bourgeois (Ashton Scholastic)

Feelings by Alikì (Pan)

There's a nightmare in my cupboard by Mercer Mayer (Puffin)

Good night Ben by Bernard Waber (Hodder and Stoughton)

Bedtime for Frances by Russell Hoban (Scholastic)

The red woollen blanket by Bob Graham (Viking Kestrel)

Willy the wimp by Anthony Browne (Knopf)

You're the scaredycat by Mercer Mayer (Macmillan)

Cowardly Clyde by Bill Peet (Houghton Mifflin).



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