

OMNIBUS BOOKS

Teachers' Notes Just a Dog

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Teachers' Notes written by Anita Jonsberg

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INTRODUCTION

Mister Mosely, a 'bitsa' dog (half Dalmatian, half who-knows-what), isn't the smartest dog in the world according to his owner, Corey Ingram. Despite being an 'everyday dog', he features in Corey's stories about an ordinary family leading an ordinary kind of life.

Corey can remember when Mister Mosely became part of the family, even though he was only three years old when it happened. These were happier days: Corey's father and uncle were great friends as well as relatives; his father had a good job and Corey enjoyed the full attention of both parents.

Happiness proves fleeting in the Ingram household. While Corey's Uncle Gavin continues his success in the building trade and Corey's baby sister is born, his father loses his job. From there, it is a short trip into depression for Corey's father. The addition of a third child is not cause for celebration because it is merely 'another mouth to feed'.

Throughout the years, Mister Mosely acts as the glue between family members. As Corey grows up, Mr Mosely grows old and Corey and his family come to realise that Mosely is not 'just a dog'.

THE AUTHOR

Michael Gerard Bauer was born and lives in Brisbane. Michael taught English and Economics in a number of schools in the Brisbane-Ipswich region for more years than he cares to admit before resigning from full-time teaching in 2000 to pursue his dream of being a published writer. His first novel, *The Running Man*, was published by Omnibus Books in 2004 and subsequently won the 2005 CBCA Book of the Year Award for Older Readers. In 2006 his second book, *Don't Call Me Ishmael!*, was also short-listed for the CBCA awards and its sequel, *Ishmael and the Return of the Dugongs*, was released in 2007. In 2009, *Dinosaur Knights*, a time-slip adventure was published, closely followed by *You Turkeys!* for younger readers.

As unbelievable as it seems to him, Michael is now a full-time writer and his books are published in Australia and abroad.

BEFORE READING THE TEXT

NB: please check all websites and pages for suitability on the day of proposed use.

1. Think about dogs and their various roles. The page noted below is about dogs in film and literature and encourages recognition of the ways in which dogs help humankind.

<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans/programs/dogs/> (scroll down for activities for older students)

2. Have students share with the class or group their experiences with pets. Discuss how pets contribute to people's lives and the different reasons we keep them.

READING THE TEXT

(Please select discussions and activities according to your cohort and timeline.)

1 The Stories of Mister Mosely

For discussion

- Corey tells of how he inadvertently killed his praying mantis. Discuss times when you have hurt something or someone because of not thinking through the consequences of your actions.
- Look at the opening or 'hook' sentence. Is it successful at grabbing the reader's attention? If so, why?

Activity

- In pairs, examine how the author engages the reader from the beginning of this chapter. What techniques are used? Look at: vocabulary, action, tone, subjects and the interaction between them and the narrative point of view. Look particularly at the end of the first chapter, when the narrator addresses the audience directly. What effect does this have on the reader's relationship with the novel and narrator? Have pairs share their thoughts with the class.

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2 Getting Mister Mosely

For discussion

- What intrigue is set up at the beginning of this chapter? How does it function in terms of engagement?
- What do readers discover about Uncle Gavin?

Activity

- Draw outlines of the main characters (including Mister Mosely) on butchers' paper or the back of some wallpaper. Divide the class into small groups and give one outline to each. The groups are responsible for filling in the outlines with adjectives describing the characters and quotes to support these descriptions. **This activity is ongoing for the remainder of the novel.**

At the end of the novel, have the groups share their character profiles with the rest of the class.

3 Naming Mister Mosely & 4 Mister Mosely as a Puppy

For discussion

- What is Corey's most important memory of the day he chose Mister Mosely? Is this a happy or sad memory? How do you know? (Tone is important here, as Corey notes the way things *used* to be in his family.)
- Think about pets you know or own. How did they get their names? Share stories as a class.
- How does the author create humour in 'Mister Mosely as a Puppy'?
- Look at the transitions between chapters – how does the author encourage readers to continue reading?

Activity

- Draw your impression of Mister Mosely for a classroom display. Are the drawings all the same? Discuss reasons why or why not? This is a good opportunity to think about the different contexts readers have and how these affect understanding.



5 What Mister Mosely Looked Like & 6 Mister Mosely and Amelia

For discussion

- What impression of Corey's family is communicated in these chapters? How is this impression created? Look at some of the small details the author has chosen to include.

Activities

- Compare your drawing with the description of Mister Mosely in this chapter. What elements did you get right? Discuss the similarities and differences with the person who sits next to you.

- In your exercise book, answer the following questions. Use full sentences and quote where possible:

 1. What nicknames does Mister Mosely have? Explain how he got each of them.
 2. According to Corey's mum, where does Mr Lafranchi spend his evenings?
 3. How is Mr Mosely different from a dalmation?
 4. Why does Uncle Gavin give Mister Mosely an insulting nickname?
 5. How do we discover that Mister Mosely is a gentle dog?
 - 6.

7 Mister Mosely and Strangers

For discussion

A useful website for teachers prior to the discussion topics:

<http://www.childsafety.org.au/documents/KeyChildrensSafetyMessages.pdf> It is a good idea to involve your school's counsellor in leading the discussion. He or she may well have further resources to give to students.

- What should you do if you become lost?
- Is it just young children who are in danger of abduction?
- What can you do to avoid being abducted by strangers? Think about actions and words. You may want to role-play a possible incident in pairs or threes.

Activity

- Write about a time when you were lost (or thought you were). Use descriptive techniques such as: similes; metaphors; alliteration; assonance; onomatopoeia and personification. If you have never been lost, then describe an imaginary incident.

8 Things that Scared Mister Mosely & 9 Mister Mosely and the Pink Panther

For discussion:

- Like Mr Mosely, lots of dogs are scared of thunder and similarly scared of fireworks. They can't see where the noise is coming from and it seems to be all around them. Discuss what causes thunder and how to minimize dogs' stress when they are scared of noises.

Some useful websites are:

http://www.nssl.noaa.gov/primer/lightning/ltg_basics.html (in depth explanation of thunder and lightning)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RpNuXP7XBw> (clear, basic video about thunder and lightning from American news program)

<http://www.dogsandpuppies.co.uk/dogs-and-fireworks/> (useful tips for keeping pets calm on cracker night)

- How does Mister Mosely's fear of thunder make him appealing to the reader?
- How do you help your pets during storms and the like?
- What view is given of Uncle Gavin in these two chapters?
- What do we discover about Corey's father in 'Mister Mosely and the Pink Panther'? (Remember to update your character profiles with any new information.)

Activity:

- Mister Mosely is not only frightened of thunder: he's frightened of Tiger the cat and the Pink Panther soft toy.

List three to five things you are afraid of or were afraid of when you were younger. Do any of those things seem silly now or are they based on a real threat or danger? Note next to each one whether you think the fear is real and justified or simply caused by something unfortunate that happened to you in the past.

10 Mister Mosely's White Christmas

For discussion



- How does Mister Mosely create a white Christmas? What is he trying to do?
- What does the putting away of the Pink Panther toy symbolise for the family?
- Why do you think Corey's father is going to stop telling funny stories from the past?

11 The Weirdest Mister Mosely Story & 12 Mister Mosely at the Vet's

For discussion

- How does the author create sympathy for Mr Mosely in this chapter? Think about how the dog reacts to his inability to obey commands. How does Corey feel when he discovers the problem?

- Discuss how to keep fishing tackle safely stored and the impact of discarded hooks, fishing line and sinkers on pets and wildlife.
- When Mister Mosely begins to bleed at the vet's, Corey faints. What causes fainting? Who in the class has fainted and why?

13 Mister Mosely's One Trick

Activity

- Rewrite this chapter from Mister Mosely's point of view (changing from one first 'person' narrator to another). What does he think about the newspaper trick? Why does he pick up only eight other papers? What does he think of Corey's father's bad mood?

14 Mister Mosely's Lost Fortnight

For discussion

- Corey's father is worried about losing his job because of the recession. Discuss what a recession is and how it can affect ordinary families.

Activities:

- Design the 'lost' poster described in this chapter. Use your original impression of Mr Mosely from chapter four. Update your classroom display.
- Using the template opposite, create an 'emotion graph' for this chapter. The x axis represents time and the y axis represents happiness. In small groups, share your graphs and explain them to each other.
- In a short paragraph, suggest where Mister Mosely might have been for his missing fortnight and predict what items he has brought home with him.

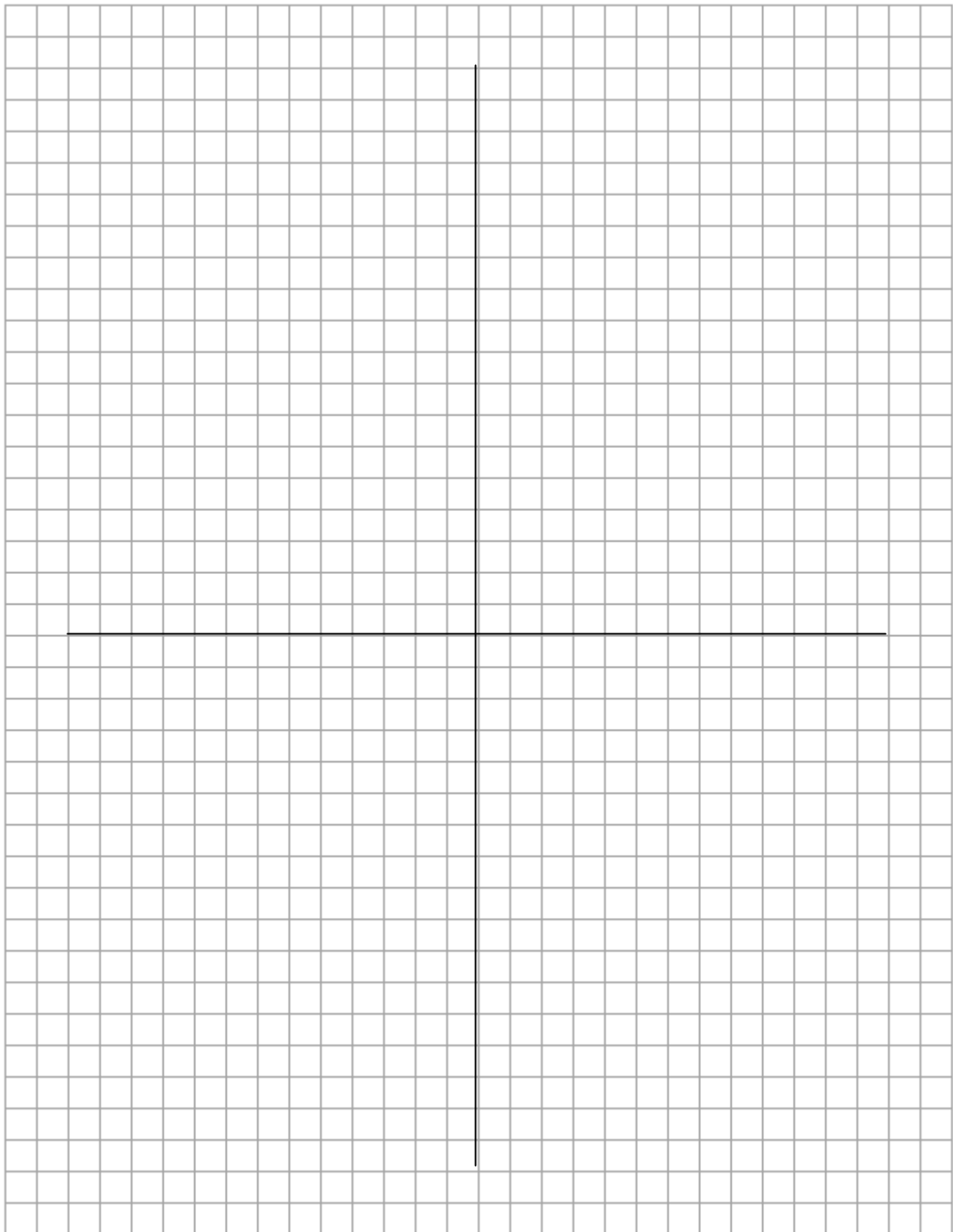
15 Mister Mosely's Mystery

For discussion:

- What type of person has decorated Mister Mosely's collar? Are there any clues in the objects themselves? What do poppies symbolize in our culture? Collate ideas on the whiteboard.
- Corey's dad wants to keep the valuable ring, but his mother reports it to police. Who is right and why? What would you do?
- Think about Corey's priorities in this chapter. He mentions that his father has lost his job almost as an afterthought. How important is this in reality?



EMOTION GRAPH
CHAPTER 14 *Just a Dog*



MyWhiteBoards.com

16 My Favourite Mister Mosely Story

For discussion

- Corey's mum gives him lots of warnings and advice about walking home from school alone. What advice did your parents or guardians give you when you were younger?
- What impact has the loss of his father's job had on the family?
- Early in this chapter, how can the reader tell that Moe really is Corey's best friend? What do best friends do for each other?

17 Mister Mosely and the Stupid Trick

For discussion:

- What makes this chapter so shocking? Just how bad does Corey feel when Mr Mosely gets hurt?
- Look at the change in tone between the beginning and end of the chapter. What makes the final sentence so powerful?

18 Mister Mosely and the Stupid Trick – the End

For discussion:

- What is Corey's father's main concern about the consequences of the accident and who helps the family out?
- Look at the description of Mister Mosely after his operation. What is the effect on the reader?
- Why does Corey rip up his mask?
- How does the title trick the reader? If you have read the whole novel, what does it foreshadow about the next section of it?

19 Mister Mosely and Mum

For discussion:

- What is a 'sixth sense'? Share stories about times you may have experienced one.
- Do you think that Moe really has a sixth sense about Corey's mum's pregnancy or are there other possible explanations?
- Why is Corey's dad upset by the news of pregnancy?

Activity

- Compare and contrast the character profiles of Corey's mother and father after this chapter. Take into account things you have learned throughout reading. Draw a table like the one below and fill it in.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN COREY'S MOTHER AND FATHER	DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COREY'S MOTHER AND FATHER

20 Mister Mosely and Grace

For discussion

- Corey's father has a job that takes him away from the family and Uncle Gavin has to take Corey's mother to the hospital. Why does this unsettle the reader? How does this link with what Corey says later in the chapter?

Activity

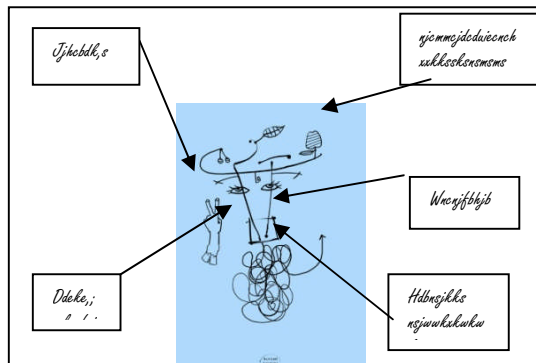
- When Corey's father gets to the hospital, Uncle Gavin makes lots of jokes but Corey's father doesn't respond much.

Make a visual representation of Corey's father's mood at this point. It can be abstract and colour can be used to help convey feelings. Use chalk, crayons or paint to create the mood. Stick your finished piece to a larger piece of paper and annotate each element to explain what it shows.

Here are some examples of abstract art:



The finished piece might look something like this:



21 The Day Mister Mosely Changed

For discussion:

- Explore why Corey's father is angry when he returns unexpectedly from work and finds Uncle Gavin already there. Collate ideas on the white board in a table that separates his feelings from their possible causes.
- Is it okay that Corey and his mum don't mention the money they receive from Uncle Gavin? Why or why not?
- Explore the notion of dramatic irony and highlight how it is used in this chapter in terms of the naivety of the narrator and the knowledge of the reader.
- In your opinion, is Corey's father 'acting like an idiot'? What does Moe's 'transformation' suggest about this?

Activities:

- Update character profiles with any new information.

22 Mister Mosely and Dad

For discussion

- What has happened to Corey's father? How is he attempting to cope? Is this the right way?
- Why has he begun to talk to Mister Mosely rather than his family? Why is sometimes good to talk to a pet?

Activity:

- Write a two-paragraph prediction of how the story might end.

23 Mister Mosely and the Stairs & 24 Mister Mosely Back on the Porch

For discussion

- Mister Mosely has cancer. Discuss how this is symbolic of Corey's family.
- Corey is in charge of Mister Mosely's medicine. How old do you think Corey is at this point?
- What effect does Mister Mosely's continued efforts to bring the paper have on the reader? How does Corey try to help Mister Mosely still feel useful?
- How does Mister Mosely's deterioration help to bond his family?



25 Mister Mosely – Just a Dog & 26 Mister Mosely's New Place

For discussion

- Explore the different ways the characters respond to Mister Mosely's death.
- Why does Corey's mum hit his father and what does Corey's reaction to their argument suggest?
- When Corey's father digs a grave for Mister Mosely he makes it 'like a person hole'. What does this tell the reader and how does it contrast with his earlier suggestion that Mister Mosely was 'just a dog'?
- According to Corey's mother, his sister Amelia is too young to witness a burial. Do you agree? Why do people hold burial ceremonies?

Activities

- Why does Corey's view of his father alter in chapter 26? List the memories that Corey experiences during Moe's burial.
- Write your opinion about why Mister Mosely is to be buried with the sheet stained with Uncle Gavin's blood.

27 Mister Mosely's Bowl & 28 Toasting Mr Mosely

For discussion

- Corey is close to maturity at the end of the novel. What elements of this part of the novel help to convey this?
- What signs of hope for Corey's family pervade these chapters?
- How is Mister Mosely still influencing the family?

28 Not Really a Mister Mosely Story

For discussion

- How does the structure of the novel help readers recover from the sadness of Moe's death?
- What is the biggest lesson Mister Mosely taught Corey and how can this help everyone?

Activity

- Reflect on the novel as a whole. Write a paragraph about each of the following:
 - 1. What you really liked.
 - 2. What you didn't like.
 - 3. Some things you learned while reading the novel.
 - 4. Other books you have read that link in some way with *Just a Dog*.

Finally, score the novel out of ten .

POSSIBLE MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

Creative

1. Make a poster-sized story map of the novel. Using pictures that you have sourced or created, represent each chapter. Link each group of images with Mister Mosely's pawprints.

Then: write a commentary explaining how your images link with and represent each chapter.

2. Write a short story about what happened during 'Mr Mosely's Lost Fortnight'. You can write from Mr Mosely's perspective, or from the point of view of the person who found him. Be imaginative about what happened to keep Moe away from his family for such a long time.
3. Design a film story-board that shows what happens in 'Mister Mosely and the Pink Panther' or 'Mr Mosely at the Vet's'.
4. Write a letter from Corey's father to Uncle Gavin which attempts to make amends for his violent behavior in 'The Day Mister Mosely Changed'.
5. Design a brochure or web-page about caring for dogs (or a different kind of pet).
6. Choose one section of the novel and re-write from a different narrative perspective.

Analytical

1. *Mister Mosely is not 'just a dog'.* Using evidence from the text, argue for or against this statement.
2. How important is the setting of *Just a Dog* in communicating themes of family relationships?
3. The novel is 'Not Really a Mister Mosely Story'. Using evidence from the text, discuss this statement.
4. How is symbolism used throughout the novel to convey the main ideas?
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of the first-person narration of *Just a Dog*.

