

Teacher's Notes



Big Dog Little Dog

Written by Sally Rippin

Illustrated by Lucinda Gifford

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

RECOMMENDED FOR

3+ aged readers (grades 1-2)

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- English; Personal and Social Capability
- General capabilities:
 - ACELA1429
 - ACELA1786
 - ACELT1783

THEMES

- Blended families
- Communication
- Sharing
- Consequences
- Loneliness and friendship

SYNOPSIS

Big Dog has a good life, with all the things a dog could ever want – walkies, sit, come, and (the best of all) get down! Big Dog is only a little bit lonely when his best friend is gone.

But when Big Dog's best friend finds a new friend, who moves into the house with Little Dog, everything changes.

At first Big Dog tries to get Little Dog in trouble, but it doesn't work, and Big Dog ends up getting put outside instead. But when Little Dog won't sleep without Big Dog, Big Dog starts to realise that having more than one best friend might not be the worst thing.

Big Dog Little Dog is a gentle story about getting along and finding room in your heart for new friends.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Rippin is one of Australia's best-selling and most-loved children's authors. She has written over 50 books for children and young adults, and her mantle holds numerous awards for her writing. Best known for her **Billie B Brown** and **Hey Jack!**, and **Polly and Buster** series, Sally loves to write stories with heart, as well as characters that resonate with children, parents and teachers alike.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Lucinda Gifford is a children's book author and illustrator based in Melbourne, Australia, and she spends a lot of her time drawing in front of an audience. Lucinda draws in notebooks, on digital screens, on easels, and on huge bits of cartridge paper stuck to walls and windows.

THEMES

This beautifully simple narrative uses the relationship between two dogs to explore themes of friendship, family, and learning to open our hearts to new people. The story of Big Dog and his best friend is beautifully specific but can be applied to a variety of experiences – children learning to navigate a blended family or expecting a new sibling will recognise the jealousy and possessiveness that Big Dog struggles with when Little Dog arrives. Others will apply the challenges to their experiences with friends – learning to compromise and share, or to find ways to work together when others do things differently. All children in the early years of primary school will find ways to relate this story to their own lives.

WRITING STYLE

Sally Rippin's simple, direct language and short clear sentences will be easy for young listeners to comprehend. The names 'Big Dog' and 'Little Dog' are general enough that they will allow readers to insert their own pets (or themselves, their siblings, their friends) into the story.

In particular, the dialogue gives readers the chance to think about the way we communicate with each other, and how words and phrases might mean different things to different people. Readers might like to think about the different ways that Big Dog and his best friend interpret instructions, and how Big Dog and Little Dog communicate with their friends and with each other differently.

COMPREHENSION

- Describe Big Dog's life before Little Dog. What makes him happy? What makes him sad?
- What is Big Dog's favourite moment of all?
- How do you think he feels when his best friend goes to work? How do you know?
- Make a list of the differences between Big Dog and Little Dog? Why does Big Dog feel frustrated that Little Dog does things differently? Do you ever feel frustrated when people don't do things the way you think they should?



- What does Big Dog do to try to get rid of Little Dog? Why do you think he wants Little Dog gone so badly?
- How does Little Dog make Big Dog's life even better than it was before?

WRITING EXERCISE

Write about a time that someone new came into your life. Write about a day in your life before you met them, and a day in your life afterwards. How did you feel? Did you get along straight away? How did you learn to live with each other?

ILLUSTRATION STYLE

Lucinda Gifford's illustrations are colourful and realistic. The emotions of the characters are clear in their expressions on the page, and readers will find the familiar scenes comforting. Gifford quickly creates a sense of what 'home' looks like to Big Dog – the park, the garden, and the couch. The focus in each of the illustrations is on the relationships between the characters – shown in the way they relate to each other.

Readers might like to talk about the way that the colour grey is used to show sadness in the story – it is most obvious when Big Dog is left home alone and the whole page is coloured in shades of grey, but if they look closely, observant readers will see grey shadows creeping into other illustrations where the characters are feeling sad.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

- The story is really written from Big Dog's point of view – we see how Little Dog moving in affects him. Try writing the story from Little Dog's perspective. How do you think Little Dog feels about their new life? What do you think their life looked like before they met Big Dog?
- What colours do you associate with the following emotions?
 - Happy
 - Sad
 - Excited
 - Confused

Draw a picture to go with the writing exercise above and use colour to show how the characters are feeling.

- Big Dog does LOT of naughty things to try to get rid of Little Dog. What do you think the worst is? What would you do if someone you didn't like joined your family? How would the other members of your family react?
- What does your family like? What do you do together to have fun? Draw a picture of your favourite moment with your family (don't forget to use colour!)

