

Living in Harmony Series

Theme: Adjusting to a New Home/ Reading to Shelter Dogs



Goal: Provide children with opportunities to explore the themes of empathy, resilience, and community.

Book Used in Lesson: *Leo's Dogs*

Written by Ellen Skowronski. Illustrated by Maria Russo.

Available in English and many bilingual editions. For a complete list of languages, check www.LanguageLizard.com.

Snapshot of Lesson:

- Children **predict** what they think the story will be about.
- Children **explore key vocabulary** from the story.
- Children listen to a **reading of the story** *Leo's Dogs*.
- Children respond to the text by answering **literal, inferential, and evaluative questions**.
- Children **retell the story** of *Leo's Dogs* using words, sentences, illustrations, or still images.
- Children **devise questions** to interview a dog in the shelter.
- Children **create an advertising poster** to recruit volunteers to read to animals at an animal shelter.

Background Information for Facilitator:

Important Considerations Prior to Reading:

Leo's Dogs primarily deals with a child who has recently moved to a new country, experiencing the emotional challenges of leaving their home and their pet behind. The story explores themes of sadness, loss, and the difficulty of adjusting to a new environment. It delves into the child's feelings of homesickness and the anxiety of adapting to a new culture, language, and surroundings.

Before reading this story to your students, it is important to consider the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the children in your class. Some students may have personal experiences with moving, particularly those who have relocated from another country. For these students, the book may resonate deeply, bringing up emotions related to their own transitions. While the story can provide comfort and validation for students who have gone through similar experiences, it may also evoke feelings of sadness, anxiety, or discomfort.

Reading Programs at Dog Shelters:

In this heartwarming story, Leo, the protagonist, volunteers to read to dogs at an animal shelter shortly after he moves to a new country. Many animal shelters around the globe facilitate reading programs whereby volunteers (often children) read stories to the animals. These initiatives have yielded a range of benefits for both the readers and animals by creating a mutually beneficial environment that supports literacy development as well as emotional well-being.

For children, reading to animals provides opportunities to practice their reading skills in a non-judgmental setting. It helps to increase children's confidence as well as strengthen

their reading fluency. Other benefits include nurturing children's empathy, strengthening their social skills as well as developing a heightened awareness of animal welfare issues.

Animal shelters have observed that reading to dogs provides comfort for the animals. The reader's voice can be soothing, helping the animals to relax and feel more comfortable around people. This has helped to reduce stress and anxiety levels for the animals in the shelter environment. Increased interaction and exposure can assist in making the animals more adoptable by improving their behavior and helping them to become accustomed to human companionship.

Sources:

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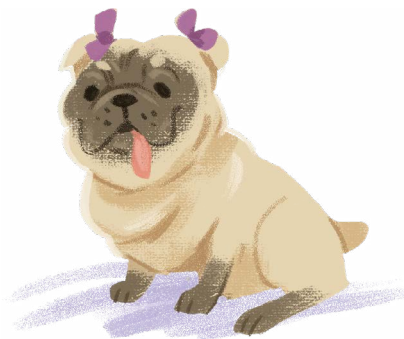
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The Kennel Club (2024). *Bark and Read*. <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/about-us/charity-work/bark-and-read/#:~:text=This%20comforting%20environment%20helps%20to,enjoy%20the%20experience%20of%20reading.>

NBC News (2016, March 4). Children Help Get Shelter Dogs' Tails Wagging by Reading to them. NBC Nightly News [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DCF_amWgkU

Nichols, Joann (2024, August 29). *The Power of Therapy Dogs as Reading Partners*. https://www.edutopia.org/article/reading-partner-therapy-dogs-classroom?utm_content=link-pos6&utm_campaign=weekly-2024-09-04&utm_medium=email&utm_source=edu-legacy



Lesson Plan: *Leo's Dogs*

Grade Level: K-2 (Note: The activities in this lesson plan can be tailored to suit the needs of the specific group that is being taught at the discretion of the facilitator.)

Time Frame: 2 x (45 minute - 1 hour) sessions.



Objectives:

Knowledge:

- Identify the range of emotions people may experience when moving, such as sadness, anxiety, and excitement.
- Learn about the concept of volunteering and its importance in the community, particularly in the context of animal shelters.
- Learn about the benefits of reading to animals for both the animals and the reader.

Skills:

- Make predictions based on observations of illustrations.
- Listen to the story of *Leo's Dogs*.

- Use language to explain and describe.
- Use language to ask questions.
- Create an advertising poster for an animal shelter to encourage volunteers to read to animals.

Attitudes:

- Develop empathy and understanding for people who experience the emotional and social challenges of moving house or country.
- Appreciate that reading aloud to others can improve their reading skills.
- Enjoy listening to the story being read in English and in the other language of the dual language book if possible. The story could be read in a second language with the help of a bilingual parent, child, or teacher.
- Appreciate different languages and scripts from around the world.

Essential Questions:

- How does moving to a new country affect the child's feelings and friendships?
- How does volunteering help Leo to feel better?
- What does this story teach us about kindness and helping others?
- How can a friendship with animals be important for people?

Materials and Resources:

- *Leo's Dogs* by Ellen Skowronski.
- Flashcards with pictures of key vocabulary words.
- Art materials for making a poster: Poster paper, markers, coloring pencils, crayons, glue sticks, scissors, etc.

Linkage and Integration Across Subject Areas:

Language Arts: Vocabulary development, reading fluency, use language to explain and describe.

Visual Art: Create an advertising poster to encourage volunteers to read to animals at an animal shelter.

Vocabulary to be Developed in Lesson:

Key Vocabulary	Story-Specific Vocabulary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• whispers• promised• allowed• accent• practice• patiently• improving• hopeful	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• goalie• animal shelter• wags• volunteer

Procedure:

Introduction:

1. Begin the lesson by presenting the cover of the book *Leo's Dogs*.
2. Ask children to predict what they think the story could be about. Draw the children's attention to various details such as the title of the story, the dog, the book in the boy's hand, etc.

Vocabulary Development:

3. Using the list of words tabulated above or any additional words, elicit known vocabulary (key vocabulary/story-specific vocabulary) from the children. This activity can be supported by the use of flashcards and/or pictures.
4. Present new vocabulary (key vocabulary/story-specific vocabulary) to the children. Using flashcards and/or pictures, invite the children to say/read each word. Ask the children if they know the meaning of the words and encourage them to provide an explanation of the word if possible. The facilitator may need to elaborate or provide additional explanations of some words and say the word in a sentence to provide a use of the word in context for the children. The facilitator may ask the children to create their own sentence containing the word, encouraging the children to make a personal connection with the word. If there are bilingual children in the group, it may be possible to ask them to say the word in their language(s).



Reading:

5. Read the book *Leo's Dogs* with the children. The facilitator may choose to read the book aloud to the children, engage in choral reading (facilitator and children read the story together in unison), or see-saw reading (facilitator reads one sentence, children read the following sentence and continue alternating reading after each sentence). It is important to read with appropriate tone, pace, inflection, and expression to engage the children as much as possible. If there are children who speak the language of the dual language book, here would be a nice opportunity to ask them to read/translate a section of the story if they would like.
6. Throughout the story, explicitly draw children's attention to the illustrations to promote comprehension of the text.
7. Encourage children to make connections (orally, using mime, in writing). Connections may be *text-to-self* (connections from *Leo's Dogs* to child's own life or experiences), *text-to-text* (connections from *Leo's Dogs* to another book/story), or *text-to-wider-world* (connections from *Leo's Dogs* to real-world events such as historical events, current events, etc.).

Discussion to Encourage Reflection and Response:

8. Facilitate discussion with the group of children using literal, inferential, and evaluative questions. The facilitator may wish to select questions from the following list:

Literal Questions:

(Readers use information directly from the text to answer this type of question.)

- i. What did Leo and Bella do together?
- ii. Where does Leo read to dogs?

- iii. What jobs do Leo and his mother do when volunteering at the animal shelter?
- iv. Does Leo's English improve?

Inferential Questions:

(Reader must use the information in the text to deduce the answer.)

- i. Why do you think Leo is not allowed to have a dog in his apartment?
- ii. Does Leo like reading to dogs? Why?
- iii. Why do you think Leo's English improved?

Evaluative Questions:

(Reader uses his/her own knowledge to explore answers to this type of question.)

- i. How do you think Leo feels when the kids do not understand him?
- ii. Why do you think it is good to volunteer in the community?

Word Identification/Fluency Development:

9. **Revisit the Story and Identify Key Vocabulary Words:** Display key vocabulary words from the story. Re-read a section from the story and ask the children to raise their hand when they hear or see one of the key vocabulary words.

The facilitator may wish to play vocabulary word games to help reinforce the vocabulary words. Some games include:

- i. Vobackulary: This involves sticking a vocabulary word on a player's back so that they can't see the word, but all other players can see it. Players take turns trying to guess the word on their back by asking yes or no questions.
- ii. Hot Potato Vocabulary: Children sit in a circle and pass a small ball ('hot potato'). Music is played, and when the music stops, the child holding the ball must give a synonym, antonym, or definition of the word called out by the facilitator. Another option is to ask the children to put the word in a sentence.
- iii. Word Bingo: Children have a grid with various vocabulary words. The facilitator calls out the definition or description of the word, and the players mark the word on their cards.
- iv. Word Match: In pairs, one child selects a card (from a set of cards with the vocabulary words written on them) and reads the word. Their partner finds the word on a word mat and covers it with a counter. When all the words have been found, the children swap roles and repeat.

10. **Retell the Story:**

Present key words from the story in the order they appear in the story (ask the children to sequence the events in the story for more of a challenge). Using the words that are

listed in order, children retell the story in small groups or pairs. The facilitator may ask the children to retell the story orally or in writing. Alternatively, the facilitator may present sentences with key words for this activity to provide the children with additional support. If sentences are used for this activity, children could create a storyboard that illustrates the main events of the book using illustrations, mime, or still images. Children can also describe Leo's feelings (and how they change) throughout the story.

Independent Work/Group Work Activity:

11. *Visual Art:*

- Inform the pupils that they will design an advertising poster for an animal shelter that is looking for volunteers to read to dogs.
- Facilitate a discussion with the students, eliciting key components of an effective poster (clear text, strong colors, attractive images).
- Discuss essential information that the pupils should include on their posters (e.g. the name and contact details of the animal shelter, benefits of reading to animals, how to get involved).
- Provide students with time to plan their posters before starting their final poster. A checklist may be helpful to encourage pupils to self-check their plan to include all required elements (e.g. title/slogan, name and contact details of animal shelter, how to get involved, inclusion of relevant images/drawing, clear information/layout, review spelling/grammar errors). The facilitator or peers can provide feedback and suggestions.
- Allow students to create their posters using their plan.

Conclusion:

At this point, the facilitator may want to revisit the essential questions to determine whether the children have understood the main ideas of the lesson:

- How does moving to a new country affect the child's feelings and friendships?
- How does volunteering help Leo to feel better?
- What does this story teach us about kindness and helping others?
- How can a friendship with animals be important for people?

As a concluding activity, invite the children to discuss these questions with the whole group, in smaller groups, in pairs, as a written reflection. An activity such as 'Two Stars and a Wish' may be a nice conclusion to the lesson. In pairs, children tell their partner two things they learned and one thing they would like to learn about volunteering in the community.



Assessment:

Facilitator Observation: Children’s engagement and interaction with the lesson, engagement in discussions, and engagement with facilitator designed tasks.

Facilitator Questioning: Higher and lower order questioning (i.e., literal, inferential, and evaluative questions).

Facilitator Designed Tasks: Making predictions, vocabulary games, reading fluency activities, poster art activity.

Self-Assessment: Two Stars and a Wish.

Accommodations/Differentiation:

Differential Modes of Representation: Pictures, flashcards, etc.

Differential Questioning: Use of higher and lower order questioning (i.e., literal, inferential, and evaluative questions).

Differential Product/Response: Written responses, oral responses, art responses.

In a classroom setting, it may be helpful for the English Language Learners (ELLs) to take the dual language book home either before or after the lesson. The children may read the book at home in the language they speak at home. This will increase the child’s confidence when talking about the book in school. If possible, ask the child’s parent/guardian to read and record the book in the language they speak at home. The recording

could then be played in the classroom, enabling children to hear other languages spoken by their peers at home. The student could also listen to the English recording of the story available at <https://www.LanguageLizard.com/Leo> prior to the class lesson.

Extension Activities:

Interview with a Staff Member from an Animal Shelter (English – Oral Language):

Ask the children to devise questions that they would ask a staff member who works at an animal shelter that involves reading to animals. Encourage children to consider questions that focus on their experience, skills, and attitudes towards working with animals as well as the reading initiative. Examples of questions may include, Can you describe your experience working with animals in a shelter? What challenges have you faced? What advice would you give to volunteers who read with dogs at the shelter?

It may be helpful for students to watch the following video from NBC https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DCF_amWgkU that shows the 'Book Buddies Reading Program' at the Humane Society of Missouri.

Journal Entry by One of the Animals (English – Creative Writing):

Challenge the students to write a journal entry from the perspective of one of the animals at the shelter. Encourage the children to think about the animal's past, its feelings about being in the shelter, and the animal's hopes for the future. Encourage the children to describe how the animal feels when being read to, what they think of the children, and how the experience affects them.

Reading to a Soft Toy (English – Reading Fluency):

Provide children with the opportunity to practice their reading fluency by reading their favorite book to a soft toy animal.

Animal Shelter Research (Social Studies):

Provide students with the opportunity to research the role and operations of an animal shelter (connect to a local animal shelter if possible). Research areas may include the history of the shelter, daily operations and services provided by the shelter, the impact of the shelter on the community, challenges faced by the shelter, and how shelters are funded and supported. Students can present their findings to the class.



Plan a Real-Life Visit (Social Studies):

If possible, organize a visit to a local animal shelter where students can read to the animals, mirroring the experience in Read a Book to Benefit Yourself and a Furry Friend! (ASPCA). Prepare students by discussing how to approach animals gently and what to expect during the visit.

Vocabulary Flashcards for *Leo's Dogs*:

whispers	goalie	promised
allowed	accent	animal shelter
practice	patiently	hopeful
wags	volunteer	improving