

Before You Were Mine

Grades 3-4

Subject: Language Arts

Character Concepts

Responsibility, Kindness, Respect, and Citizenship

Objective

Students will build empathy while learning basic pet care and responsibilities. Students will review letter writing and perspective.

Curriculum Connection

Students will focus on friendly letter writing, perspective, and inference while learning about the responsibility involved in caring for a pet and the role of animal shelters in the community.

National Standards Addressed

NL-ENG.K-12.4 Communication Skills

NL-ENG.K-12.6 Applying Knowledge

NL-ENG.K-12.11 Participating in Society

NL-ENG.K-12.12 Applying Language Skills

Information Literacy Standards- Standard 2 The student who is information literate evaluates information critically and competently.

Materials Needed

- chalk or whiteboard
- book [*Before You Were Mine*](#)
- picture of a pet who looks sad
- [KIND News Junior edition, April 2009 issue PDF](#)
- one piece of poster board
- writing paper
- pens or pencils

Procedures

Pre-Lesson Preparation

1. Write "Things That Make a Dog Unhappy" on the chalk or whiteboard. (Optional: This can be done on poster board if not chalk or whiteboard is available.)
2. Write "Things That Make a Dog Happy" in the center of the poster board.

Opening

1. Show the students a picture of a pet who appears unhappy. Review with the class that animals communicate their feelings using body language, or non-verbal communication.
2. Ask the class to brainstorm why the animal in the picture may appear unhappy. Write all answers on the chalk or whiteboard to create a class list. (Answers can include, but are not limited to: hungry, cold, homeless, no toys, scared)
3. Introduce the [author](#) and story *Before You Were Mine* letting students know that they will see different types of non-verbal communication in the story. Ask students to look for this as well as examples of things that make a pet unhappy.

Lesson Body



1. Read *Before You Were Mine* pointing out the body language of the dog and places where the dog appears unhappy. You may wish to ask inference questions such as, "Does the dog look happy or unhappy when he is tied to the tree?" and "Do you think the little dog is happy he has to sleep in the alley?" when reading those pages.
2. After reading, ask students to recall the end of the book where the little dog looks much happier. Ask students to look at the body language of the dog. He no longer looks sad; ask students to describe how they can tell the dog is happy.
3. Ask the students to look at the last four pages and describe some of the things they see that make a dog happy. Place the "Things That Make a Dog Happy" poster board in the front of the room. Ask students to create a list of things that make a dog happy. (Examples can include items in the book such as toys, walks on a leash, as well as items not in the book.) The poster should remain visible during the rest of the lesson.
4. Pass out writing paper to each student. Ask the students to write a letter from the perspective of the dog waiting for adoption to a future family. Letters should be written as if the dog was speaking and should include items from the "Things That Make a Dog Happy" poster. (Optional: Review [letter structure](#) with the students.)

Closure

1. Have students count off in pairs. Ask each pair to complete a peer reading of their partner's friendly letter and then return to their desk. (Optional: Additional time for revisions may be desired.)
2. Ask students to hang their letters on the classroom bulletin board with the poster "Things That Make a Dog Happy".

Extension Ideas

1. Ask students to think about the author Maribeth Boelts. Orally discuss the following questions:
 - What inspired her to write this book?
 - How might she know about things that make a dog happy?
 - What is the author trying to tell you?
2. Ask an animal care and control professional or volunteer to visit the class and provide profiles of pets waiting for adoption. Students can create letters for each pet. Upon completion the letters can be posted on the kennel door for potential adopters to read.