

W. Bruce Cameron

A

DOG'S
way HOME



Educator's Guide



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Guide written by Amy Cameron.



I. How to Use the Study Guide

Respecting the teacher's autonomy in the classroom, this guide includes vocabulary words, teacher's tips, grammar lessons, and essential questions. As more teachers are adhering to state standards, exercises have been included that can easily match up to state requirements.

Included also are suggestions for informational text. This guide lends itself to the use of journals or "Bell Starters." As the teacher goes through the novel, there are multiple opportunities to refer to nonfiction text, news reports, social media examples, and more.

It is never too early to teach students how to "have a conversation with the text," so depending on the grade and skill level, there are annotation examples that model this skill throughout the study guide. Teachers sometimes ask for the Lexile of various books, and as literature teachers, we understand that it involves more than the difficulty of the text. A novel can be taught at different grade levels; the themes and underlying motifs can be explored at all ages. We just expect a more thorough analysis in the older grades. Just as W. Bruce Cameron's novel *Emory's Gift* has been taught in sixth grade, advanced classes, and gifted programs, it has also been taught in junior levels in high schools across the nation. The same treatment of the novel works here. Students as young as sixth grade may read the novel, but the analysis works for every grade.

Only the classroom teacher truly understands his or her body of students. While teacher tips and grammar ideas may not be applicable for all skill levels, they can all be modified to fit your student's reading and analysis skills.

As teachers understand, feedback is extremely important. If you believe a section should be added to this study guide, or that it should be modified in any way, we would like to hear from you. Visit wbrucecameron.com to send us your suggestions.

Remember that students are reading less and less fiction today. That is why it is important to provide them with a great story they can relate to, which you will find in *A Dog's Way Home*.

As ever, good reading!



II. Importance of Relevant Vocabulary

Research supports the use of vocabulary that is relevant to the readings students are exposed to. The days of random vocabulary lists, with weekly assessments, are proven to be less valuable than giving students an opportunity to read text and use the vocabulary they are reading. After all, a random list of words will only evaluate a student's rote memory. We want students to acquire and use language, not memorize a list of words the night before an exam and then lose it.

All vocabulary in the book is given by chapters, including the page numbers where the words are used. Teachers can decide what words to use. Students themselves may choose these words if given a chance in literature circles. Several grammar lessons include the vocabulary in this novel. Teachers may want to consider the use of Vocabulary Walls. For younger students, vocabulary can be separated by using cutouts of dogs, cats, people, and mountains and then writing the words on these cutouts as they appear in the text. It would be useful to use these same images in an "annotation" worksheet, where students find and use words by associating them with the images. In this way, a word like "remote" might be placed on a picture of a mountain, while the word "pensive" might be put on the image of a cougar.

For older students, similar separations can be used. Students can separate words by parts of speech. Students can be given a task of finding examples of new and challenging vocabulary and creating Frayer Models, which can give them more time with each word. As a teacher, I find the Frayer Model useful when students have a difficult time with new vocabulary. Attaching a visual with a word has been shown to be an effective practice. Students can create their own "vocabulary journals" where they find new words, define them, and find a computer image to demonstrate the word's meaning. Your artists in the class may choose to draw these images.

As always, Cameron makes considerable use of adverbs in his writings. This is useful to all students who struggle with parts of speech. Creating adverbs from adjectives, and nouns from verbs is a useful practice in the application of morphology in your instruction. Autonomy is just as important to a student as to a teacher, so allowing your students to choose some of their new vocabulary words is always a good idea.



III. Essential Questions and Literature Circles

Essential Questions are added throughout the study guide to be used as part of the lesson plan, a “bell ringer,” a journal, or as a question posed in literature circles or whole classroom instruction. They are also useful for short writing prompts or essay questions on assessments.

Before you read the novel, I suggest you read Jeffrey Kluger’s essay “Why Dogs and Humans Love Each Other More Than Anyone Else,” (July 20, 2018) from *Time* magazine’s “How Dogs Think: Inside the Canine Mind.” Kluger makes the argument that the relationship between canines and humans is more than “symbiotic.” You could start this unit with a discussion of his ideas here. When he surmises that the relationships between dogs and humans have gone on for years, you may want to offer a reading in “The Dog Master,” also by W. Bruce Cameron, which is an in-depth novel of the bond between dogs and humans from thousands of years ago. The argument is made that humans could not have survived without domesticating the wolf. Students often have a hard time understanding that their little poodle at home has DNA from a wolf. What a great opening for cross-curricular instruction/conversations. There are also plenty of folk stories written that use the dog as an object of admiration and love.

Sprinkled throughout the study guide are questions that can be used to spark conversations, invite critical thinking, prompt writing activities, and encourage research. If teachers allow students to veer from the original question from time to time, what may follow could be inspirational, especially when it comes to the legal issues raised in the novel. The question of “fair and equitable” laws is relevant, especially in our world today. The use of literature circles will help teachers facilitate these discussions.

No matter what the grade level is, teachers can use literature circles effectively to inspire critical thinking. However, protocols should always be used, and students should have assigned roles in a group. As always, consideration should be placed on how to assign the groups. You do not want your weakest readers all in one group, unless you have the ability to work with that group almost exclusively.



A good technique to distribute your top readers among your weakest readers is to divide your class in half by ability level, and assign the top two students from each list, working your way through the students to create groups. Depending on class size, this has proven to be effective. By combining groups this way, weaker readers are “pulled up” by stronger readers, and stronger readers are not held back by the weakest readers in the class. This is particularly important for differentiation in instruction. Teachers can provide questions and tasks that adhere to the levels in each group; documentation is often needed to appease administrators that these techniques are being used.

Students in literature circles will have the experience of addressing a prompt and applying textual evidence to support ideas. The use of informational text to offer support is also important. Comparing themes across curriculum or types of texts is a standard in all states.

SOME QUESTIONS TO USE BEFORE READING THE NOVEL

- Should dogs be considered more than chattel?
- Do dogs have unalienable rights? If so, what are they?
- Why do dogs and humans have a bond?
- How do dogs learn?
- Is there such a thing as a “bad” or “violent” breed of dog?
- Can a domesticated dog survive in the wild without help from humans or other animals?



IV. Vocabulary List by Chapters

(For your assistance, page numbers are also given for each word.)

Chapter One

Exotic.....	9
Recesses.....	10
Communal.....	10
Residual.....	10
Surged.....	11
Wafted.....	11
Beseeking.....	11
Probing.....	12
Relentless.....	13
Comprehension.....	14
Assurance.....	15
Illuminated.....	15
Inexplicable.....	16
Yearning.....	16
Ravenously.....	16
Combatants.....	17
Anguish.....	18
Consumed.....	18
Resolutely.....	18
Lured.....	18
Demolition.....	19
Feral.....	19
Monotonous.....	20

Chapter Two

Redolent.....	21
Chaotic.....	21
Cowering.....	21
Dread.....	21
Enticed.....	22
Compulsion.....	22
Acute.....	22
Assume.....	24
Subtle.....	25
Unethical.....	26
Vetting.....	26
Protocols.....	26
Stringent.....	26
Exceptions.....	26
Luxuriously.....	27
Backhoe.....	32

Chapter Three

Demolish.....	35
Sterilized.....	37
Malnutrition.....	37
Humanely.....	37
Treacherous.....	37
Assessing.....	41
Pointedly.....	42

Chapter Four

Irony.....	45
Submission.....	46
Reinstated.....	46
Subsidized.....	47
Extorting.....	48
Implying.....	48
Reassure.....	49
Impasse.....	51
Morsel.....	51
Alertly.....	53
Radiated.....	53
Compelling.....	54
Dismay.....	56
Shambled.....	57
Leer.....	58

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Delectable.....	64
Tantalizing.....	65
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Solitary.....	67
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Elated.....	89
Scaled.....	90
Corral.....	91
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POW.....	93
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Condemned.....	96
Absolve.....	97
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Complacent.....	100

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Variation.....	109
Emphatic.....	111
Appeal.....	113



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Emitted.....	116
Devastating.....	118
Incessant.....	119
Reeked.....	119
Affidavit.....	119
Yearning.....	119
Lethargic.....	122
Reiterate.....	123

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Muted.....	127
Foreboding.....	127
Consuming.....	128
Gravely.....	128
Subsidy.....	128
Comply.....	130
Defuse.....	131
Rhetoric.....	131
Profound.....	131
Bureaucratic.....	138
Euthanized.....	138
Processed.....	139

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Co-mingled.....	141
Coalesced.....	141
Disparate.....	141
Palette.....	141
Imbedded.....	142
Redolence.....	142
Expansive.....	144
Contemplating.....	145
Vulnerable.....	147
Caustic.....	148
Acrid.....	148

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Forensics.....	154
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Infused.....	165
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Taut.....	174
Audible.....	175
Coordinated.....	175
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Algorithms.....	269
Genetically.....	269
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Tersely.....	271
Definitively.....	271
Pavilion.....	272
Arctic.....	273

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Ferocious.....	276
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Rabid.....	285
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Harboring.....	316
Darkly.....	317
Serenely.....	317
Escalate.....	319
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Federal.....	320
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Wearily.....	321



V. Chapter Summaries

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why are we surprised when one species of animal raises an animal not of its species?

ANTICIPATORY SET

A montage of video clips of animals from different species living together in harmony.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What can we learn from animals who co-habitat without conflict?

YOUNGER AGES

can make a prediction:
What is going to happen to the puppy?



1

Chapter One

Chapter One opens with a narrator, writing in first person, who is a puppy. We discover she is living with feral cats underground. The “Mother Cat” is raising and protecting her kittens, and the puppy resides with her mother and siblings. While the puppy seems happy, there is foreshadowing in the quote, “This was my fun wonderful life, and I had no reason to suspect it would ever change” (Cameron, 10).

When there is danger, Mother Cat is alert, and the puppy picks up on her tension. When humans inspect the underground lair, the puppy is “strangely drawn to them,” a theme to be repeated in the novel. We figure out that the feral cats are living underground in a space that has been targeted for demolition and the building of an apartment complex. A young man feeds them, so Mother Cat is not completely on her own for food. Flashlights from what we assume are workmen on the site probe their nest. A man asks if they are going to have a problem and if they can poison the cats. The man assures them that there will not be a problem. When the men come with nets and try to catch the kittens, Mother Cat takes the puppy to the back, out of sight. The men try to catch the kittens and make a discovery of puppies. A dog they call the mother dog is caught. When our narrator naps and awakes, she discovers that her mother and siblings are gone. Some cats return after the frenzy of the night before. The puppy interacts with the kittens, but not the adult cats. The puppy recognizes the smell of the returning human (not one of the workmen) and a woman. She tells the man that the contractor cannot get a demolition permit if it means destroying feral cats. When the man inquires about the dogs and cats already taken, she tells him that there is no law stating that one can’t trap and destroy animals living on one’s own property.

When they leave, nighttime comes and a light penetrates the den once more. Mother Cat is terrified. Puppy feels the stress. A man yells out, “Hey, there’s a puppy in here!”



INFERENCE

What can we infer from the woman's words when she says, "We have to assume the worst"?

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What is unconditional love?

2

Chapter Two

The woman is back, and she is the one crawling through the nest with her flashlight. When she talks directly to the puppy, the puppy feels a compulsion to go to her. The man and woman try to guess the puppy's breed. She also informs the man that by asking around, she has not heard of a rescue shelter taking in kittens and cats lately. She explains that they "have to assume the worst." The man talks the woman into giving him the puppy. She is taken to a new home, where she learns the word "treat." The man's name is Lucas and he lives with his mother. In a short period of time, the puppy loves Lucas. Lucas names her "Bella."

Every day they go to the den to feed the kittens. When a backhoe is delivered, he can sense the fear coming off of Lucas. While Lucas's mother had some reservations about taking in a puppy, Bella knows her name and a few other words. Her whole world is this young man.

Chapter Three

In chapter three, Lucas confronts the contractor, a man named Gunter Beckenbauer. Lucas tries to stop the demolition, and they have a heated conversation about the feral cats. Gunter tries to justify the demolition by stating that they got all the cats. Lucas disagrees. The police come, and Bella learns how to identify police by their uniforms. They tell Lucas he cannot interfere when the woman who was with him before shows up. Her name is Audrey, and she has brought a camera to film the event.

Audrey informs the officers that she is with Animal Control, and that if they pull down the house, they will be committing an illegal act. The contractor, who smells like smoke and meat to Bella, pleads with the officers to arrest Lucas and Audrey. The man insists that there are no cats left, when Mother Cat sprints out of the nest. When the officers refuse to arrest the pair, because no law has been violated, the interaction breaks up. At the end of the chapter, when Bella is playing with Lucas in the apartment, there is a knock at the door. Bella can smell the smoky meat man. He tells Lucas that they have to talk.

3

EXPOSITION

In chapter two, we have more information. The man is supposed to go to med school. The other is a veteran, and he works at the Veteran's Hospital in Denver. There is a concern for money, because Lucas's mother reminds him how expensive it is to raise a dog.



Chapter Four

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Are there enough laws to protect animals?

When Gunter comes in, he asks if Bella is a pit bull. Lucas says that it is unknown, an important point in this novel. The man asks if Lucas has been the one feeding the cats. When he affirms this, the man says that there is irony there. He says that if Lucas puts out food for cats, they will come. Gunter states that he can shoot the cats if he wants to, and Lucas asks him if he wants that kind of publicity. The man asserts that the reason he is there is to avoid that, and emphasizes the money that delaying the construction is costing him. He goes on to bribe Lucas by offering him a new apartment. He also offers \$1,000. Lucas is offended, and asks for \$10,000, knowing that this is too much of a request, but trying to make the point that no amount of money will make him look away while the man exterminates innocent animals. The man accuses him of extortion and threatens to arrest Lucas for trespassing if he is caught on his land. When the man leaves, we learn more about the relationship between Lucas and his mother. She asks why saving the cats are so important to him and he says, "I guess cause they are all alone in the world" (51). The mother assumes that his obsession with saving the kittens have to do with his upbringing. We learn that she is an alcoholic, a single mother, and that he had to grow up "fast."

In the meantime, Bella learns new words. She hates the "crate," where she has to go when alone. She goes on a walk in a park and learns how to run up a slide, to Lucas's delight. She is unhappy when Lucas goes to work, but Mom says Bella has a "sixth sense" and learns when Lucas comes home. Bella seems to know he is coming. We can infer that when Mom lies on the couch, she is depressed.

Although Bella is taught not to bark, because they live in a no-pet apartment, Bella barks when a man appears at the door. We find out that Mom's name is Terri. A man at the door, who smells like chemicals, appears. Terri asks the man how he found her. The man is obviously intoxicated, and when Terri will not allow him back into her life, he gets mean. He talks about Lucas's father; we learn that he was found dead behind a liquor store. We can infer that this was a time in her life when she, too, was probably taking drugs, if not just alcohol. When she asks the man to leave, he reaches out and grabs her.

4





INFERENCE

What kind of meeting is Terri going to?

5

Chapter Five

When the man yells at Terri, Bella is terrified. After a few choice words, Terri reacts by hitting the man. Bleeding, the man yells at Terri, who demands that he leave. When they crash into a table, Bella stops barking. The man leaves, wounded, and Terri starts crying. Bella provides comfort. Terri calls Lucas and recounts the violent exchange. She ends by telling him that she will go to a meeting.

When Lucas takes Bella to the den next, there is a No Trespassing sign. He lifts Bella over the gate and tells her to go into the den so they can rescue the cats. They end up rescuing two of the cats. Bella touches her nose to that of Mother Cat, but knows instinctively that Mother Cat will not follow Bella out of the den. As a treat, Lucas gives Bella a nibble when they get home: a tiny piece of cheese. Bella so loves it that it makes Lucas laugh.

The next afternoon, when Bella is alone with Terri, he senses something strange in her smell. When she offers Bella treats, Bella eats them hurriedly. She knows something is wrong with Terri. Bella hears a crash and finds Terri on the ground. Knowing something is wrong, Bella barks and barks for help. When Lucas comes home, Bella leads him frantically to where his mom is lying on the floor. An ambulance is called and Lucas leaves with his mother. Bella is left alone, feeling like a “bad dog.”

Although Bella knows it is “bad,” she eventually has to go to the bathroom. When Lucas finally gets home, he takes her for a walk and we learn that the mother has had a grand mal seizure. An eviction notice is posted on their apartment door; they are in violation of the ordinance against pets on the property. Mom tells Lucas that Bella can no longer bark; it will give her away.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How do service animals BECOME service animals, and what can the animals do to become service animals?

6

Chapter Six

In this chapter, Bella meets new people. She goes to work with Lucas at the Veteran’s Hospital and meets a variety of people. He also meets Olivia from the maintenance department. She and Lucas seem to have a connection. Bella is “smuggled” into the hospital, but it gives the patients there a sense of purpose to protect her. We learn of Dr. Gann, a man who works in the hospital. In the ward, Bella makes many friends, providing comfort. The patients include Ty, Mack, Steve, Marty, and Drew. After a day providing comfort and cheer, Mom and Lucas have a talk about how she believes that Lucas thought she abandoned him in his childhood. We also find out that she has tried to commit suicide before. When Lucas and Bella go to “feed the cats,” they find a notice of demolition, and Bella ends up running after Mother Cat.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What kind of animals are used for emotional and physical support?
Are there specific breeds that are used for this?
What restrictions are currently in place in different environments?
Airplanes? Apartment dwellings? Public places?



INFERENCE

Bella goes to the veterinarian and receives a “stiff collar.” What is the inference?

7

Chapter Seven

The season changes and Bella experiences snow. She provides comfort to the veterans at the hospital and feels she has this purpose. The veterans continue to hide Bella from the administration in the hospital; it is said that they are running the ward like a POW camp. The altercation with the builders and the cats continues to loom in their lives. The contractor is very agitated over the expense the delay is taking and comments how building in the winter is not cost effective. He declares a war on Lucas, and Lucas warns Bella that he doesn't “have a good feeling about this” (97).

When Mom becomes sick again, Bella can sense it and warns Lucas. They learn that 15% of dogs can sense seizures. When they come home to another eviction notice, they know it is the action of the contractor.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the Fair Housing Act, and how does it apply to service animals?

8

Chapter Eight

When Lucas contacts Dr. Sterling about service animals, he gives them hope about keeping Bella but warns them that the process to get her certified is not swift. To avoid their eviction, Dr. Sterling writes a letter to state that Bella offers support to Terri.

The reader can infer that the “war” Gunter warned Lucas about includes the use of an Animal Control officer. In the meantime, Lucas has taught Bella a variation of the command “Go Home!” The Animal Control officer visits them to inform them that they have an illegal pet, a pit bull, a breed that is illegal in Denver, Colorado. When he is told that Bella is a therapy dog, he throws a treat on the ground, which Bella gobbles up. The Animal Control worker informs them that a therapy dog does not eat treats thrown on the ground. He informs them that if he catches the dog outside, he will impound Bella. On the first offense, she will be chipped; on the second offense, she will be destroyed. When Lucas tries to appeal to the man, stating that Bella is not a vicious animal, the Animal Control man states, “If the law says she is a vicious animal, she's a vicious animal” (111). We also find out that if two officers in Animal Control say that Bella is a pit bull, then the law says she is a pit bull. There is no appeal process.



DISCUSSION QUESTION

What can we do if we believe a law is unjust?

DISCUSSION QUESTION

At the end of the chapter, the animal control truck is following Bella. How is this foreshadowing events to come?

9

Chapter Nine

When Mom takes Bella for a walk, Bella can smell the Animal Control officer nearby. He catches them and tells her that he is impounding the dog. Mom yells for Bella to “Go Home!” But Animal Control follows her and throws a treat. Bella is caught. When Bella is taken to the shelter, she can smell the fear and confusion from the other dogs. She believes that if she is a good dog, Lucas will come get her. She is confused and afraid. A woman working there tells the officer that she cannot confirm that Bella is a pit. We learn that the man’s name is Chuck. We discover that there is corruption here when Chuck states that two other officers have agreed that Bella is a pit. The woman tersely replies that one of the “officers” is on vacation and cannot make that assertion. It seems that it is out of her hands. Bella is heartbroken.

A man named Wade seems to care about her; he takes her for walks and rinses out her cage. When Lucas gets Bella back, he is warned that on her second violation, she will be held for three days and destroyed. When they take their walks, Bella can smell the Animal Control truck behind them.

10

Chapter Ten

When Lucas takes Bella to feed the cats, Bella can smell the Animal Control truck. When Chuck confronts them and threatens to “dart” Bella, Lucas pleads with him. He tells them that he will move from Denver. The police appear; the female officer seems kind. While Bella can perceive a “profound sadness” in Lucas, the officers tell Lucas that he has to comply. They allow him to put Bella into the truck. He is crying his goodbyes, thinking that his dog will be killed. At the shelter, Bella joins the other dogs, howling in her distress and sadness.

Lucas gives Wade, a man he knew in high school, \$100 to get Bella out of the pound. Lucas knows that the only way to save Bella is to get her out of Denver. Audrey comes to help. She will take Bella to Durango until Lucas can get there. In a crate again, seeking Lucas once more, Bella feels like a “bad dog.”

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do you become a foster parent to animals?

11

Chapter Eleven

With Lucas’s blanket around her, Bella is so depressed that she does not eat for two days. She is given to foster parents, Loretta and Jose. For two weeks she is given walks in an expansive state forest, but she is always on a leash. Bella has one purpose: to go home. We learn that summer is coming. Bella always knows the direction home, and although she likes her foster parents, she can only think of Luke. When she is exposed to a slide that nestles up against a fence, she takes the escape and runs up the ladder and leaps over the fence. She does not sleep for two days. Determined to get home, she heads in that direction. Cold and hungry, she stays by streams for water, but avoids people. She feels vulnerable. At the end of the chapter she hears two boys shooting guns. They smell of alcohol.



12

Chapter Twelve

The boys, Warren and Dude, find Bella and feed her beef jerky. They take her in, thinking that there may be a reward for her rescue. When they leave her in the car at the police station, Bella climbs out of the window. As she heads home, she comes across a town and a pack of dogs. She feeds with them, learning how to dive in dumpsters and learning that some people are nice and will feed them. People = food. Even though she can have security and food if she stays with the pack, one man says, “Go Home!” to the dogs, and Bella recognizes that her way home is through the hills and streams. She is willing to face danger if it means she will find her way back to Lucas.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Can the students find examples of dogs who have found their way home across many miles? Pair and Share.

13

Chapter Thirteen

Bella is propelled forward to home, but it takes her into deep wilderness. At times she can survive by the presence of wooden tables, burned wood, and trash cans. She discovers two hunters in the woods, both with guns, and she can smell blood. They have been poaching cougars. She sees a female cougar; her mate, we infer, has been killed. The female cougar follows Bella. Bella names her “Big Kitten.” Her experience with Mother Cat give her the experience of living with cats. There is a powerful pull to protect this kitten, but at the same time, she does not trust the humans. Bella thinks, “If a dog couldn’t trust humans, how was life even possible?” They come across a dead deer and feed. Big Kitten purrs and rubs her neck against Bella. They curl up next to each other to sleep; they also play together. Almost by accident, they learn to hunt together. Summer brings people into the outdoors. They avoid the people, but sometimes they luck out on food that they have. They learn how to share food, although hunger is a constant pull at Bella.

At one point, Bella smells something that disturbs her: coyotes. She instinctively knows they are dangerous. Bella knows the coyotes’ purpose is to hunt and kill them. She turns to face the danger.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How would Bella know that coyotes are dangerous if she has never encountered them before?

14

Chapter Fourteen

The coyotes and Bella face each other. Bella has an instinctive rage against them. She has to fight four coyotes. She starts barking her fury and suddenly smells people. A man yells and the coyotes leave—rescuing Bella from probable death. When the men see her courage, they think Bella belongs to a poacher. They feed her, trying to decide what to do. Bella leaves, after saying her goodbyes to each man. She knows that Big Kitten is following.



15

Chapter Fifteen

Big Kitten and Bella have a symbiotic relationship. Although she is curious about Big Kitten's nighttime activity, Bella and Big Kitten have a relationship that works. They prevent thirst by drinking from the streams, but the hunger is constant. With the lack of food, Bella becomes lethargic. She thinks, "Without people, I was powerless" (186). The two of them find a deer with a "stick" in her neck. She had run with an arrow in her and finally collapsed in death.

One day everything changes—snow. Visibility is low, and making their way through the snow is tedious. Big Kitten takes down an Elk, and Bella recognizes that she is in charge. At one point, there is a choice. With Big Kitten there are rocks, snow, and steep hills. Downhill means people. Bella picks up the scent of humans. Two humans are yelling at a man and his dog. They are in an unprotected, illegal area where avalanches have happened. Suddenly, there is one.

16

Chapter Sixteen

The man is buried in snow. The dog with him is frantically trying to dig him out. Bella, without hesitation, goes to join the dog and helps dig him out. The two men on cross country skis help resuscitate the man. We learn they are Gavin and Taylor. The two men mistakenly believe that both the man's dog and Bella belong to the buried man. When Mountain Rescue comes, they ask them what to do with the dogs. A woman tells them that they are not equipped to rescue dogs and leaves the dogs in their care. The men are kind, and while they identify "Dutch" as a Burmese Mountain Dog, they cannot figure out Bella's breed. Their best guess is that Bella is a bullmastiff. The men take the two dogs to their cabin in the mountains. Dutch has his name on his collar, which is why they know his name. They are a little disgusted with the man they saved, because Dutch has a collar with his name and is "rotund," while Bella has no name on the collar and her ribs are showing.

Dutch cannot eat and stands alertly at the door, wanting to be with his master. Bella recognizes the anguish, but believes that her stay with the men is only temporary.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why can't the majority of domesticated dogs survive in the wild?

17

Chapter Seventeen

At the cabin, Bella worries about Big Kitten. In the meantime, the men try to guess Bella's name. When she reacts to her name, they believe they have discovered it. They buy her a name tag. We learn that they are a couple. One man is an author. Bella learns the name "suitcase," because one man, Taylor, travels. When Taylor leaves, the rules change. The dogs are allowed to sleep in bed with Gavin. Dutch is still very sad. The dog toys just remind Bella of Lucas. When they take walks, Bella knows the Big Kitten is nearby. When Taylor comes home, they discover the owner of the dogs is a man named Kurch. They know they have to give up the dogs and are very sad. Gavin says it is the hardest thing he will have to do. They take a drive to return Kurch's dogs. We also learn that they cannot keep the dogs because they are planning a trip to China for six months.

**DISCUSSION QUESTION**

Why would a dog stay with an owner who is inhumane to it?

18

Chapter Eighteen

Although they are somber and sad, the two men take Dutch and Bella to see Kurch. They believe that he owns both dogs. Dutch becomes very excited when he can smell home and runs to meet his owner. The owner is not happy to see the dog. The home is rundown and unkempt, and Kurch is not thankful at all for the return of the dog. He complains that he is on his own and cannot care for Dutch. Even though the two men are responsible for saving his life, he sneers at them when he finds out they are married. Sadly, the men understand his bias and his unkind disposition. Much to Dutch's dismay and anguish, they take both dogs back to their home. When they get to the men's home, Dutch sees a cat and takes off. Bella understands where he is going.

19

Chapter Nineteen

Bella helps Gavin find Dutch. Bella believes that Dutch is doing his version of "Go Home." The men are still going on a long trip to China and finally come to the conclusion that the dogs can stay with Sylvia, Gavin's mom.

When they get to "Farmington," Bella has lost her scent of home. Sylvia has a female cat named Chloe, who is pregnant. Bella knows to leave her alone, but Dutch is very interested in getting to know the cat. When the two men leave the dogs at Sylvia's, Bella can sense their sadness. Dutch is confused. Bella has learned that "people are not as reliable as a dog would like" (234). Bella decides that at first chance, she will leave and find Lucas.

20

Chapter Twenty

Sylvia is not a good dog person. She never takes the dogs for walks. There is no slide to escape. Sylvia smokes cigarettes by her pool and drinks. Sometimes, she even forgets to feed the dogs. A man named Mike comes by and they fight. This stresses both dogs. Then Mike threatens Sylvia, and the dogs come to her rescue. She throws out all of his things into the yard. Chloe has kittens. Bella understands that both she and Dutch "waited for people who never arrived." One day Sylvia ties up Dutch to furniture and moves inside. The kittens, who capture his attention, play around him. Sylvia receives a package one day and leaves the box by the pool. The kittens have fun playing in the box. Suddenly, Dutch goes after one kitten and drags the furniture with him. The furniture knocks a box of kittens into the pool. Mewing their distress, Bella saves them, one by one. Exhausted, Bella tries to get out of the pool. Not knowing how to escape, Bella is at the point of drowning.



DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why was Bella drowning in the pool? Why didn't she just walk out?

21

Chapter Twenty-One

Sylvia finally goes out and shows Bella how to get out. Bella observes as the kittens are leaving, one day at a time. Dutch has lost all of his energy. He is so sad, now for the two men, that he is lethargic. Bella says that Sylvia never let them out and never let them chase a ball. The only thing she does is feed them and let them in the house at times. One day, Dutch becomes super excited and Gavin appears. It has been six months. Dutch is so happy that Bella understands that Gavin is Dutch's person, just like Lucas is hers. On the long ride home, Bella can smell home again. Although she loves Gavin and Taylor, she yearns for Lucas.

When the two men take the dogs to the cabin and let them off their leashes, Bella heads home. Dutch goes with her for a while, and then Bella senses that Dutch is saying "goodbye," and he turns back to his person. Bella moves on.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Bella is glad that Dutch has the two men, but now strives for home. She comes across a burned-up forest and feels alone and very thirsty. Although she knows her direction will take her away from Lucas, she knows she has to eat, and she heads for town. Bella discovers a supermarket and the smell of grilling chicken. She learns that the doors open when she steps on it and takes the chance to grab a chicken. She is chased by a man in the grocery but makes a second attempt to get yet another chicken. She steals another chicken and feels guilty, and the man chases her again. She believes that "angry men hurt dogs," and she evades the capture. As she goes through the town, she sees a homeless man, and sensing his pain, she goes to comfort him. He is nice to her, but when she gets close, he ties her up. She realizes, at the end of the chapter, that she has made a terrible mistake.

22

INFERENCE

What do we suppose is the condition of the man?

PREDICTION

What will Bella do?

23

Chapter Twenty-Three

The man's name is Axel, and he keeps Bella tied up. They sleep on sidewalks, and she can smell the alcohol on his breath. Although he ties her up, she feels like the man needs comfort. He talks to himself.

During the night, the man is agitated and fevered. Bella feels important with Axel. An officer "Tom" often visits. He tells Axel the he will drive him to Denver and warns him of the cold of winter. Officer Tom asks Axel if he is using again. Bella now faces another winter, where she curls up against Axel for warmth. People try to help Axel and they give him a tent and stove and food. Axel reminds Bella of Mack, a veteran from the hospital. Axel is paranoid and reclusive. Bella observes him using a "plastic pencil" from time to time, and he sleeps soundly. He often disappears for hours, leaving Bella alone. One night, three men trash his tent and belongings. Bella thinks about Dutch and how Dutch and Bella had warded off Mike. Bella knows what to do and takes off growling at the men.



RESEARCH QUESTION
What is the Silver Star
and what do you have to
do to earn one?

24

Chapter Twenty-Four

With a “ferocious wrath” both Axel and Bella charge the young men, destroying their “home.” They take off running, and Axel inspects what is left of his belongings. They have ruined almost everything. That night it was so cold, that the two of them remained cuddled together. Officer Tom comes the next day with the boys and their dads. They apologize and call him “Sgt. Rothman.” They make up for what they have done, and Officer Tom says, “I guess I just became the soldier who won the Silver Star.”

Bella and Axel go through a very cold winter, and then it is spring. Axel is told he has to leave the park. They find a place by the river. Bella can smell the scent of a coyote nearby and Axel is getting worse, health-wise. Axel paces and yells, and leaves Bella for days at a time, forgetting to feed her. Because she is tied up, she cannot get to food. Axel returns one night with one of his needles and calls Bella to him. He calls her his best friend and stops breathing. She lies all night with her head on his chest. She recognizes death. She also smells the coyote getting closer. Bella cannot reach her food or the river and ends up howling at the cars on the road to stop. No one does. Just when Bella recognized that she was getting sick, some boys ride by on bicycles.

25

Chapter Twenty-Five

The boys come back and untangle Bella from a tree limb. They also discover Axel’s body and call 911. Bella is still leashed to Axel when the paramedics come. They assume the cause of death is an overdose. When they unleash Bella, she can drink from the river. Bella goes to smell Axel and his belongings one more time. Bella thinks, “This was, I realized, the last time I would ever smell him. He had left and would never be coming back. Things repeated, which is how dogs learned” (190). While people are milling around Axel, Bella knows it is time to “Go Home.”

When Bella leaves, she comes to the realization that she is being hunted by coyotes. Up in the boulders, she prepares herself for the battle of her life. She readies herself, in “primitive fury.”



Chapter Twenty-Six

Bella knows, as the coyotes are coming, that she is bigger, but they are desperate. Bella can identify that they are three young males and with her back to the boulders, she turns to fight them. As the fight starts, and she lashes out, there is a blur of another animal above her that flew out and lashed out at a coyote. They all flee and Bella recognizes her savior as Big Kitten. Big Kitten had grown, and in Bella's eyes, is huge. Bella is injured in the fight, and Big Kitten licks the wound. Bella believes that if Big Kitten comes home with her, Lucas will feed her, like he did with the other cats.

Bella recognizes that Big Kitten's hunting habits have changed. Now when she killed her prey, she buries it for later. Still, the hunger and the desire to get home make Bella head for a town. When there were people, there was food. Although Bella wants Big Kitten to follow, she will not. Bella understands that this is a goodbye.

When Bella finds herself in a town, she smells food coming from a truck. When she climbs in, she discovers bags of dog food. She becomes trapped in the truck. When the truck stops, she leaps out and she resumes her trek home, sleeping at night in parks. She can hear cars, and she returns to streams to drink. She missed Big Kitten, and at night, she has vivid dreams. She dreams of all the people and animals that have gotten her this far. She believes that have all come to say goodbye.

Bella is now so close, she cannot stop nor sleep. She makes her way to her hometown, and the excitement is palpable. She finds the apartment and barks loudly. An old woman answers the door and gives Bella treats, but Bella is distressed. Lucas is gone.

26

PREDICTION

What will Bella do now?

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Why are they protecting the dog and using their military status to do so?

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Bella goes where she has memories and reunites with Mother Cat, only Mother Cat has a new name. A lady calls her "Daisy" and puts food out on her deck to feed her. While Mother Cat does not seem afraid of the woman, Bella notes that she does not smell of humans. Bella seems to understand that cats do not crave the touch of humans like dogs do. While Bella is on the street, she smells the bad man, the Animal Control driver. Bella runs to the "Go to Work" door, but no one will let her in. Suddenly, Bella hears her name being called. It is Olivia! Bella is full of joy, relief, and love. We find out that Bella has been gone for more than two years!

Olivia, gushing over Bella, gives us more information. She and Lucas had driven all over Durango looking for Bella—and she introduces Bella as her "fiancé's dog." Bella is named the "Miracle Dog." Chuck, who has chased Bella into the hospital, meets a formidable gang of people. Bella is delighted to see Ty, Layla, Steve, Marty, Jordan, and Mom. Olivia calls Lucas. Chuck says he is there to confiscate the dog and is executing a warrant. The police show up. When Chuck threatens to take the dog, Ty tells him that he will have to get past "the Fourth Infantry Division of the U.S. Army" (314). Mom adds "Eighty-second Airborne Division, U.S. Army." Suddenly Drew wheels forward and announces the presence of "the Second Marine Division." The police seem afraid.

27



Chapter Twenty-Eight

The police announce the arrival of the Sheriff. Bella is anxious and not understanding. Chuck, called “Hat-man” by Bella, says he is there to “execute a dangerous animal confiscation.” Everyone is tense. Mom says that no one is going to take Bella. Two more police cars show up and the New-man says that he is going to have to take Bella into custody. Mom disagrees. At this time, Dr. Gann pulls up. Marcus Gann and Sheriff Mica introduce themselves each other. The veterans tell Dr. Gann that Bella is an emotional support animal and that no one is taking her. Hat-man says he has the authority by a Denver ordinance to take the dog. At this moment of heightened anxiety, wondering how this “fight” might go on, Dr. Gann says, “This is not the city of Denver. This is federal property.” New-man sees his point and announces that they are clearing out. When Chuck threatens to watch for the dog to take it into custody, he is admonished by New-man, who tells him that he will not do so, and that he is out of the field for more training. Dr. Gann admits that he will not enforce every rule in the book, so we can assume that Bella is welcome in the hospital. A new car pulls into the lot, and Bella instantly knows who it is: Lucas.

Crying and wagging her tail, Bella flies into Lucas’s arms. Bella is beyond ecstatic. She keeps thinking, “I was Go Home at last. Go Home with my person, with Lucas” (322). Amazed at Bella’s journey, we find out she has gone over four hundred miles to get home. Lucas states how guilty he has felt, and Olivia tells him that Bella forgives him. She adds, “Dogs are amazing like that” (325). They take Bella to see Mack, who has taken a turn for the worse, but he brightens up when he sees Bella. Bella can feel the sadness breaking up in Mack, and she feels happy that she is doing her job. When Olivia, Lucas (who is now in med school), and Bella go home, they bring out Lucas’s blanket and feed her a tiny piece of cheese, the ritual they love. Bella reflects on the fact that all the people and animals she met were all responsible for getting her home. In the end, she is finally, “Go Home at last.”

28



VI. Teacher Tips

Many ninth-grade English curricula include a reading from Homer's "The Odyssey." Comparing the two stories would give students an ancient tale and a contemporary tale that have similar features. In *A Dog's Way Home*, Bella recognizes that it is the journey that has made up her life in getting home. The reflection is the same for the protagonist of "The Odyssey." Odysseus is obsessed with getting home, and he receives help from gods and prophets. In the end, he acknowledges that the journey is what made his life.

This novel lends itself to comparing notes from the novel to that of informational text. Great opportunities for research appear throughout the novel. When students ask questions in Literary Circles, be prepared to assign research topics. Topics could result in a three-minute oral presentation, or a ten-minute writing exercise. More formal research topics can result in more formal presentations. Once students get used to the three-minute presentation, complete with summarizing their citations out loud, they become more articulate and precise. It is a great lesson to learn how to weed out the extraneous information in their research and make solid points.

EFFECTIVE RESEARCH TOPICS TO ASSIGN

- History of Domesticated Dogs
- AKC and the "Pit Bull"
- How Do Animals Serve Humans?
- What Gives the Pit Bull a Bad Reputation? Rumor vs. Facts
- Duties of Animal Control
- Stories of Different Species Interacting
- Airlines and Rules About Emotional Support Animals

PERSUASIVE TOPICS COULD INCLUDE

- Dogs Lengthen Our Lives
- Emotional Animals Need Less Severe Certification
- Veteran's Hospitals Need More Money
- There are No Bad Breeds of Dogs, Only Bad Owners



VII. Grammar Genius

Cameron has an acute sense of the “perfectly placed” adverb. Students can improve their writing by using a variety of adverbs. Students can identify the adverbs from their readings and/or the vocabulary lists. Have students create their own sentences using the adverbs assigned. Model the use with a single sentence written on the board: “He walked across the path _____.” Have students come up with 20 adverbs that fit. The more students use adverbs in exercises, the more easily they will insert them into their own writing.

Use the novel for examples in sentence structures. In Literary Circles, have students identify a specific number of complex sentence structures. Using some of Cameron’s dependent clauses, have students create their own sentences. Again, model this first and then let them work together to collaborate on their writing.

Identify examples of foreshadowing throughout the novel. Have students explain how this creates the tone and mood in the novel.

There is no better way to improve punctuation than by modeling its use. Supplement grammar lessons with textual examples. Dialogue, and the proper use of quotation marks, is modeled with the use of a novel. Give students a chance to rewrite dialogue.

Retired grade-school and middle-school teacher Laurie White, from the Kyrene District in Phoenix, Arizona, states that she uses Cameron’s novels to teach punctuation: “For my younger kids (fourth graders), we used novels like *Max’s Story* and *Molly’s Story* to increase their reading comprehension, but we also pulled out sentences to look at the correct use of punctuation and capitalization. Instead of using worksheets they were not familiar with, we used worksheets they recognized from the books they were reading. It was very effective.”





VIII. Power Standards

Although state standards vary, there is some consistency. All Reading Literature standards have to do with identifying themes and motifs, comparing them to other texts, and connecting them to our life experiences. We teach students to evaluate the writing craft, and we ask them to evaluate, assess, design, create, write, present, and reflect on different aspects of the novel.

We teach the mechanics of writing with grammar, punctuation, semantics, and syntax. Younger students can identify plot structures and use plot graphs to separate the chapters. Older students can assess the use of transitions and identify what propels the plot.

Lesson plans in the study guide also use informational texts in research. The purpose of study guides is to assist the teacher in organizing materials to use in lesson planning, and take some of the tedium out of the planning. For every question asked, research can be done to provide answers. Since reading about animals is of high interest to students, the motivation to stay engaged is stimulated.

Students can identify with the characters in the novel. Many have grown up with single mothers or have a veteran in the family. Journaling is a good exercise for processing these experiences, and it meets one of the writing expectations. We want students to process information and annotate. Annotation can be taught through graphic organizers, and even the youngest reader can start annotating texts for central ideas, character motivation, and questions/surprises in the text. Literary Circles will help in discussing cause and effect, using analogies to make points, and demonstrating the formation of critical ideas, supported with persuasive language and textual evidence.

There are plenty of creative writing opportunities. Aside from personal narratives, students can write a screenplay, write a different ending, or create a dog's "journal."



IX. Project-Based Learning Design

PBLs meet several state standards in one lesson design. To create a successful PBL, have an overriding question that appears on all of the rubrics, worksheets, directions, etc. that you produce in the classroom. This question is critical to the success of the PBL. It gives your students autonomy. As the teacher, you can include it in the assessment. Using Backward Lesson Design, decide how you will be able to tell that the students have learned. What kind of product will they produce? How will they present their information? What kind of outside sources can or should they use? How much research is required?

EXAMPLES

- What can we do as citizens to overturn an unjust law?
- How can humans deal with the overpopulation of dogs and cats in the community?
- How can we serve our veterans more humanely?
- Can we rescue dogs and veterans together?

Be prepared for students to take directions you may not have anticipated. You can require them to use a source of social media to inform or persuade the public. You can require that they speak to experts in certain fields.

You can require them to produce a taped interview with an expert.

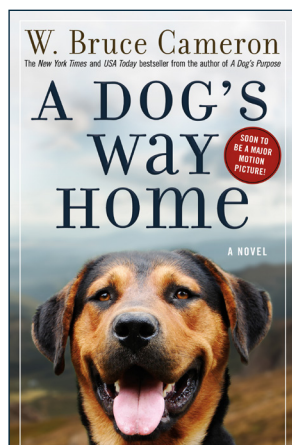
You may want to start with determining whether your community has specific animal ordinances, their history, and how they are enforced. The students may surprise you with how personal these issues may be to them.



Provide a very specific rubric. Let them know how to earn points each step of the way and make it a unit's main project. Good PBLs take six to twelve weeks, depending on the rubric and the time allowed for the research. Scaffold the lessons and the requirements/expectations of the groups. Have students turn in various parts of the project (clumping) so that they can earn points along the way. Have them evaluate each other and how much they contracted to the project. Also, it is more effective to have timed sessions for their research. It reduces off-task behavior.

Have a short informal meeting with each group of students at the very beginning to find out what they have chosen. Have them do some research on the topic before they meet with you. Ask them important questions and require them to write the questions down. This will allow them to assess whether they are on the right track, and if they are thinking of all the ways their products/presentations/research/recommendations can expand. At the same time, make sure their research is not so broad that it is not focused. They have to answer the overriding question. PBLs can be informative or persuasive or both. Make sure you invite outsiders, including administrators and possibly people in the community to come in to see the presentations at the end. Inform your students that they should dress formally. Provide your audience with a simple rubric. Show the students how the audience will judge their presentations. Record them if you can. A great idea is to expose your students to formal presentations delivered by upper classmates. As long as your expectations are clear and consistent, the critical thinking that will bloom in the classroom will make you proud of your students.

Guide written by Amy Cameron.



For information on extending lesson plans, using other Cameron novels and/or study guides, and gaining access to other teachers who have used Cameron novels in the classroom, feel free to contact me, Amy Cameron, at acameron@frontierschools.org.