

Teacher Notes

Story Inspiration

I wrote *My Dog Socks* in memory of my lovely old canine companion, whose name, unsurprisingly, was Socks! We got him as a tiny puppy from the RSPCA, where the woman assured us he would grow into a 'smallish' terrier. Obviously no one told Socks this, as he morphed into a very large black dog of indeterminate heritage. His name went through a number of changes, until we settled on Socks, in reference to the pale dappled fur which encircled his paws.



Socks was an idiosyncratic character who often reminded me of other animals; he would chew reflectively on grass, roll about like a bear and snort like a pig...the idea for *My Dog Socks* was born.

Proving that dogs from the wrong side of the pound can achieve greatness, Socks went on to literary fame as the author of my second book, *Dog Logic: a pooch's guide to dogs behaving badly* (his photo proudly adorns the back cover of the book). As The Philosophical Pooch, he also penned a column in *Dogs Life* magazine for a number of years and still has his own Facebook page. A very clever canine indeed!

Socks lived a long and happy life, with our other literary hound, Snowy (author of *Midget Bones' Diary*) before moving onto the Rainbow Bridge at the venerable age of 14.

Themes:

- Friendship, loyalty and belonging.
- A strong bond between a boy and an old and royal dog with an unconditional love.
- The importance to accept others as they are that nurtures a genuine friendship.
- The boy's imagination projects ordinary dog, Socks' shadow onto extraordinary creatures that bring up a joyful world.

Discussion Points

Before Reading

- Look at the front and back cover of *My Dog Socks* and predict what the story will be about. What sort of story do you expect? What clues do the title and illustrations give you?
- Do Socks and the boy look happy or sad? What makes you think that?
- What breed of dog do you think Socks might be?
- What age do you think the boy on the back cover is?
- Why do you think the dog was called Socks?

After Reading

- What are the different animals in Socks' shadows that appear throughout the book?
- What do you think the boy feels about each different animal?
- Why do you think the boy imagines the ordinary dog, Socks' shadow changes like a chameleon?
- When or what animal does the boy like Socks best?
- Why do you think an ordinary dog like Socks is so special to the boy?
- Discuss the acceptance of others such as family members and friends. How difficult it is and how important it is to nurture true love, yet we often tend to demand others to be someone else. Discuss how you were hurt to be asked to be someone else.
- Discuss the importance of unconditional love or to accept what they/you are and its paradox. Unconditional love can change a person to be better and brings a true friendship like the boy and Socks.
- Imagine you're the boy. What sort of animals or insects do you imagine for a dog or your own pet? Where do you want to go with your imagined creatures? Write down them. Draw them.
- Sadami used watercolour to paint illustration. Colours convey a mood. Look up the colour circle and discuss what colours send different moods.
- Compare each spread's mood. For example, look at the spread of a wolf shadow and the spread of a penguin. What colours were used? Tell which season is found and how do you feel by colours?
- Draw your friend's face in a simple way, create a few similar drawings. Paint them in different colours. Compare the outcomes of a mood, yet it is the same person in each drawing.
- In the colour circle, opposite colours make contrast, while similar colours make harmony. In the spread of a dolphin shadow, which colours are outstanding or unified? What about other pages?
- A "wet-in-wet" technique blurred the edge of shadows, Socks' fur and the boy's hair. Which other pages has Sadami achieved wet-in-wet?
- Create hard and soft edges by wet-in-wet in watercolour painting such as in landscapes and still life on A4. Painting timing is crucial to create successful washes.
- A "waxing" technique saves white and already painted colours such as Socks' whiskers and highlight in a front cover. Where else can you find crayons used in the illustration?
- Enjoy watercolour painting with crayons that draw highlight or something shining like stars in a sky or save different colours from a background in your paintings.

Activities

My Dog Socks is an excellent text to introduce young readers and writers to literary devices and grammar in a fun and entertaining way. The book lends itself to adaptation and change, just like Socks! Here are some ideas for classroom activities.

- Alliteration/Adjectives – Think of extra alliterative adjectives to describe the animal shadows – a *big, beautiful, bouncing*, black bear; a *wicked, warm, wacky*, wild wolf.
- Synonyms/Adjectives – Exchange the adjectives describing the animal shadows with words of similar meaning; greedy goat to *voracious* goat, friendly frog to *sociable* frog. For an extra challenge, try and maintain alliterative synonyms; daring dolphin to *dauntless* dolphin.
- Antonyms/Adjectives – Exchange the adjectives describing the animal shadows to words of opposite meaning; e.g. black bear to *white* bear; wild wolf to *tame* wolf. For an extra challenge, try and maintain alliterative antonyms; terrible tiger to *terrific* tiger.
- Verbs – identify and change the verbs within the text, while maintaining a similar meaning:
 - when we hike *tramp* through the forest, when we explore *investigate* the beach, when we play *frolic* in the garden.
 - Hopping *jumping* on long legs and reaching *begging* for snacks
- Rhyme – add extra rhyming words; flapping and snapping and *clapping*, pouncing and trouncing and *flouncing*.
- Alphabetical order – make a list of the different animals in Socks' shadows that appear throughout the book, then arrange them in alphabetical order.
- Metaphor – metaphors are repeatedly used to compare Socks to his various animal shadows. He turns into a ... contented cow ... greedy goat ... daring dolphin etc. Discuss why the author has compared an ordinary dog to these other animals.
- Onomatopoeia – find examples of onomatopoeia within the text; howling, barking, croaking etc.