
THE ADVENTURES OF TAXI DOG

Authors: Debra and Sal Barracca

Illustrator: Mark Buehner

Publisher: Dial Books for Young Readers

THEME:

People have special relationships with their pets...they really are loyal friends!

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

A stray dog in New York City is adopted by a taxi driver, with whom he rides and shares adventures each day.

LeVar takes viewers to the city to see the many ways people “hail” taxi cabs, and then viewers discover how a canine companion helps Lisa, who is in a wheelchair.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Ask students if any of them have ever been for a ride in a taxi cab. Are there taxis in the town where the students live? What size towns usually have taxis? Why do people use taxis?

Discuss the point of view of *The Adventures of Taxi Dog*. How might the story be different if Jim were the narrator? Discuss the role of the narrator of a story.

Maxi does all sorts of things to entertain the passengers in Jim’s taxi. Is Jim aware of Maxi’s antics? Why doesn’t Jim know what Maxi is up to?

Ask the students if they have ever seen a pet in a store or in a place of business. What kind of business was it? What was the reason for the animal being there? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of having a pet at one’s place of work? What special circumstances might there be for the necessity of having an animal at work?

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Thinking that having a taxi dog like Maxi is successful for Jim, other taxi drivers might want a dog to ride in their cabs too. Have students write a want ad for a “taxi dog.” Discuss the types of information that might be in such an ad. Look at newspaper want ads before beginning.

Obtain copies of the three sequels to *The Adventures of Taxi Dog* and use them to discuss how and why authors sometimes decide to continue the

adventures of story characters through sequels. These three books are *Maxi, the Hero* (illus. by Mark Buehner); *Maxi, the Star* (illus. by Alan Ayers); and *A Taxi Dog Christmas* (illus. by Alan Ayers). The last two books in the series were illustrated by a different person from the illustrator of the first two books. Have students compare and contrast the illustrations as they examine the sequels. As a class, write another sequel about Maxi and Jim for the series.

Have students cut out pictures of dogs from magazines, newspapers, old calendars, greeting cards, etc., and glue them onto construction paper squares or index cards. Brainstorm different attributes by which to sort the dogs, e.g., curly hair, straight hair, long hair, short hair, pointed ears, long ears, large dogs, small dogs, long tails, short tails, and the like. Students will have other ideas for categorizing the pictures.

Compare a taxi with other forms of public transportation, such as a subway, bus, overhead train, water taxi, air taxi, etc., and discuss how some forms may be more appropriate for certain locales than others.

Not all stray dogs are as fortunate as Maxi in finding a good home. Take a field trip to an animal shelter or invite someone who works there into the classroom to explain to students how people can claim lost animals, how animals are adopted, the challenges of maintaining the facility, and ways that responsible pet care can help alleviate the stress on the shelter. After the visit, discuss ways that the class can inform others about the work of the shelter. They might make posters or write a flyer. They might also organize a drive for donations of items that can be used at the shelter. (The shelter likely has a wish list of items, such as pet food and treats, pet toys, old towels and blankets, cleaning supplies, etc.)

Have the class make edible “Puppy Chow” using this recipe:

Ingredients:

- 1 stick butter or margarine
- 1 package of chocolate chips (12 oz.)
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 box Rice Chex cereal (12 oz.)
- 3 cups powdered sugar

Directions: Melt butter, chocolate chips, and peanut butter together and mix well. Spread the cereal in a large flat pan. Pour the melted mixture over the cereal, stirring it until the cereal is evenly coated. Put the powdered sugar in a paper sack, add the coated cereal, and shake well.

Invite a taxi driver to bring her/his taxi to the school parking lot to talk to the students about driving a cab and to show them the inside of the taxi and how the meter works.

Start a “Dogs in the News” bulletin board with the class. Have students collect newspaper and magazine articles and pictures about dogs. As different pieces are posted, discuss any common themes the students notice in the articles. Do any of the articles make them feel happy, sad, or angry? Do any of the articles make them want to take action? Do any of the articles give them new information about dogs?

The young woman in the program had a canine companion. Have students investigate the training and work of dogs who provide services. For information, contact local agencies that work with individuals with physical disabilities or that have visiting dog programs.

RELATED THEMES:

city life
friendships

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #112 — Martha Speaks
Program #43 — Best Friends

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Debra and Sal Barracca are native New Yorkers who were inspired to write *The Adventures of Taxi Dog* after they rode in a taxi whose owner kept his dog with him in the front seat. They have their own company that publishes books for children and make their home in New York with their daughter and their pet cats.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Mark Buehner grew up in Utah and worked for many years as a freelance illustrator. *The Adventures of Taxi Dog* was his first book for children. He has collaborated with his wife on several other books, for which she wrote the words and he did the illustrations. The Buehners live in Salt Lake City with their children.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

TAXI: A BOOK OF CITY WORDS
by Betsy & Giulio Maestro (Clarion)

I WANT A DOG
by Dayal Kaur Khalsa (Clarkson N. Potter)

THE FIRST DOG
by Jan Brett (Harcourt Brace)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

DOG
by Robert J. Blake (Philomel)
I REALLY WANT A DOG
by Susan Breslow & Sally Blakemore, illus. by True Kelley (Dutton)

ROSIE, A VISITING DOG’S STORY
by Stephanie Calmenson, photos by Justin Sutcliffe (Clarion)

THE FIVE-DOG NIGHT
by Eileen Christelow (Clarion)

MY BUDDY
by Audrey Osofsky, illus. by Ted Rand (Henry Holt)

SALTY DOG
by Gloria Rand, illus. by Ted Rand (Henry Holt)

OFFICER BUCKLE AND GLORIA
by Peggy Rathmann (Putnam)

COMPANION DOGS: MORE THAN BEST FRIENDS
by Elizabeth Ring (Millbrook)

THE BOOKSHOP DOG
by Cynthia Rylant (Blue Sky/Scholastic)

POLE DOG
by Tres Seymour, illus. by David Soman (Orchard)

A SERVICE DOG GOES TO SCHOOL
by Elizabeth Simpson Smith, illus. by Steven Petruccio (Morrow)

