

Postman's Dog by Lisa Shanahan

“The Postman’s Dog” will delight anyone who has a dog, and understands the joy they bring to your life! It is a must in a school library as a great read aloud for early – middle primary classes. The discussions that come from the text and the beautiful, vibrant illustrations range from stories of our own dogs, to the grief of a family members death.

The story is about Charlie, a dedicated and friendly postman who is great friends with all the people he delivers mail to, and their dogs! Every day when he gets home, Charlie tells his wife all about his day and the stories people have shared with him. Charlie ends each day by saying that he has the best job in the world...until one day, Charlie’s wife dies. The picture accompanying this page is one that students instantly recognize as a ‘sad picture’ and discussions about what makes the picture sad compared with the rest of the book are excellent in introducing students to the ‘moods’ of colours and the power of a picture.

Whilst this may seem heavy subject matter, this is essentially a story of friends and joyous times and the tale continues from this point with all Charlie’s friends advising him to get a dog for company. As dog owners tend to do, each person recommends their own breed of dog as the best one for Charlie, but in the end Charlie chooses a quiet bitser, Lucy. Lucy turns out to be not so quiet at all, but the perfect friend for Charlie and story ends with Lucy becoming a true postman’s dog and friends with all the other dogs on Charlie’s mail route.

The illustrations in “The Postman’s Dog” perfectly complement and extend the text. Charlie’s friends are varied in age, gender and ethnicity and the story of Mr Trans ride in a leaky boat is accompanied by an illustration of what is obviously a refugee boat. So whilst the book can be read simply as a tale of friendship and lovely dogs, there are many avenues for the teacher to explore with students and the book can be read on many levels.

Discussions could centre around different breeds of dogs, multiculturalism, death and grief, the importance of friends, and what builds a sense of community. Activities to follow a reading of the book may include;

Conduct a survey of dog types owned by class members. Student may draw their dog, or a dog they know, to create a doggy display. Other dog books could be added to the display. Older students may create a graph of the different breeds of dogs owned by students in several classes.

Students may complete some research into what they believe would be the best type of dog to be a postman’s dog. Students could research their chosen breed and write or orally present a persuasive argument to the class about their reasons for choosing a particular breed to be a postman’s dog.

The story mentions four main friends of Charlie’s ...have each student create another character for Charlie to deliver mail to. The character should have something interesting about them and have a dog that suits them. The pictures and text can be done in the style of “The Postman’s Dog”. Student’s pictures can be displayed in a line, with a road underneath that has a postman on a bike cut out, as though the postman will be riding past them. Students can read the book and then read the other ‘new characters’ that have been created in the same style.

Megan Daley, Anglican Church Grammar School, QLD

Who would have thought that a dog could take up residence in the empty spaces left behind by the passing of a loved one? Here, Shanahan and Harris clearly illustrate how companionship, even of the furry variety, can alter one's emotional state and eventually bring about peace.

This story outlines the daily life of Charlie, the much loved postman. Whilst it initially appears unusual for anyone to love his job as much as Charlie does, we soon realise that it is not the delivering of mail that he finds rewarding, but the friendships he has built along his journey. Yet, into every life a little rain must fall. When Charlie loses his wife, it is as though the seasons will never change. And, just as his life is turning upside down and topsy-turvy, so becomes the once efficient mail service.

It is at this point in the story that Charlie's friends make a suggestion. He should get a dog. And so enters Lucy, a considerably passive dog who helps bring calmness to his days...that is until Charlie decides to return to work. His new companion presents a small problem. Lucy detests the postman's uniform and causes havoc in the neighbourhood with her barking. Charlie is soon left with little choice but to take Lucy along on his route. Despite a few initial hiccups, friendship takes them in a new direction and they find that time shared is the perfect place to call home, even if you visit it whilst delivering mail.

This heart warming story sends a sense of hope to the reader even before it is so beautifully stated in the text...“ And before long, Charlie felt hope tingle across his skin like soft, summer rain.” With a lovely flow to the text and a peaceful ending, this book can be successfully used one to one with young children who have experienced a loss.

The use of illustration in the book is pleasing to the reader. The implementation of multicultural characters realistically depicts today's society, particularly here in Australia. It is, therefore, relevant to groups of children in a classroom setting, and can be successfully introduced as a starting point for discussions regarding families, or a project related to family trees. The occupation of the main character also offers opportunities to discuss and research the history of written communication, from telegrams to email.

A lovely story that even the oldest of readers will find solace in.

Linda Zammit, Trinity Grammar School, VIC

Charlie, the postman, thought he had the best job in the world. He loved the parcels. He loved the letters. But most of all he loved the people, and the special time he spent with each one of them and their dogs.

But when Charlie grew sad and lonely, his friends decided it is time for him to get a dog. There was a lot to choose from, but Charlie chose Lucy. She was the answer to all his problems ... or was she?

Charlie and his friends now had another problem to solve!

This charming book covers a variety of themes including friendship, death, occupations, and multiculturalism. Its language is simple, but descriptive, and the reader is lured into the problem solving aspect of the story. Shanahan presents both the plot and the overall tone of the book in a matter-of-fact manner. Harris' illustrations are also simple, with bright colours and clear lines, and both text and pictures vary in layout and size as they are mixed throughout the pages.

“The Postman’s Dog” highlights the importance of self and community in the daily lives of ordinary people. It is a beautifully presented book with ready application to lower primary children.

Classroom Applications:

Death – it includes the event of death and how people react to it, in a very natural manner.

Multiculturalism – identify the cultures included in the story / in your class or school. What are some of their distinguishing aspects?

Dogs (Pets) - class graph of dog breeds (different types of pets)

- craft - construct dogs and make a display

- discuss other dog books e.g. Hairy Maclary (Do they have the same type of dogs).

Occupations - discuss town jobs

- to what jobs could you bring your pet? (illustrate)

Friendship - characteristics of a good friend – role play

Robyn Hopper, Mackay Christian College, QLD

“The Postman’s Dog” written by Lisa Shanahan and beautifully illustrated by Wayne Harris is a delightful picture book about Charlie the postman and the importance of our dogs in all of our day to day lives.

Charlie the postman absolutely loves his job and enjoys taking the time on his postal run to spend time with the people on his route. He enjoys their company and sharing their individual stories with them.

Wayne Harris’ digitally created illustrations complement and extend the text. They help reveal more about the characters in the text and reflect the diverse nature of Charlie’s neighbourhood.

When Charlie’s world changes with the loss of his wife, his friends encourage him to find a dog to keep him company, Charlie finds Lucy at the dog pound and brings her home.

It is when Charlie returns to work that things go a little astray as Lucy reacts to his uniform for the first time. There are some amusing incidents as Lucy and Charlie come to terms with his return to work.

“The Postman’s Dog” shows us that a sense of community is an important element in our lives, as Charlie is an active participant in the neighbourhood he works.

Investigations into the different jobs in our community such as the postman, police officer, vet etc. And also possibly how these roles have changed over time. Looking at the role of Charlie the postman and compare with the postman in the children’s local neighbourhood.

This picture book could support studies of local neighbourhoods – what makes up your local neighbourhood – physical environment and local facilities.

Look at multiculturalism could also be incorporated into the reading of this picture book – look at families and the different types of families that are part of society and the cultural backgrounds of people in the local community.

Of course, a look at the different types of breeds of dogs that exist. Investigate the types of dogs and who they are suitable for. Do they match the characters in the book? What type of dog would be most suitable for your family? Graph the number of dogs and other pets owned by members of the class.

Melissa Buske, Mercedes College, SA

Lisa Shanahan's book, "The Postman's Dog" remind us of the human need for companionship. Charlie is the local postman, and along with the mail, delivers friendship to the people of the town and their dogs. At the end of the day, Charlie shares his news and stories with his wife. When his wife dies, Charlie becomes lonely and depressed. The local people realise this and encourage Charlie to get a dog. With all their suggestions to the breed, Charlie visits the local dog pound and chooses Lucy. Unfortunately his new companion becomes upset when Charlie dons his uniform for work.

Throughout the story, there is a warm endearing quality. Lisa treats the sadness and depression that follows death with sensitivity. We feel the same concern for Charlie as that of his friends in the community. Children will love Lucy's reaction to Charlie's uniform and the solutions to the problem.

Teachers could use this book to:-

- Illustrate the grief cycle
- Identify community connections
- Introduce a discussion of people in a community
- Develop a sequencing game for events
- Create a matching game for owners and their dogs to increase awareness of the book characters
- Identify simple character traits
- Identify Charlie's problem and suggest solutions
- Discuss "She hates postman". Is this true or is there a deeper issue.
- Suggest different country origins for the main characters and use this to initiate a discussion of where ancestors/family of children in the classroom originate.

KLA HSIE – Self, Community.

Suzanne Singleton Brown, OLPS, NSW