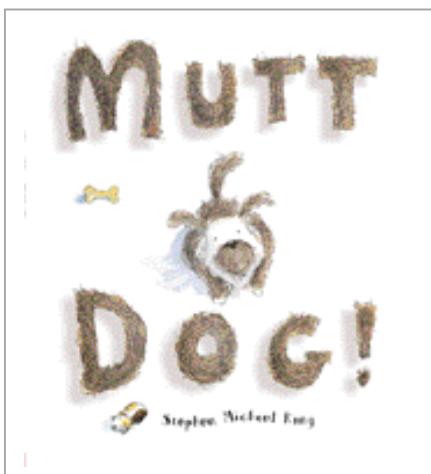


TEACHER NOTES

Mutt Dog

by Stephen Michael King



Mutt Dog is a stray. He wanders the city trying to find food and a safe place to sleep. One day he follows a lady who also lives on the street to a halfway house. A woman who works there gives him some food and a comfy box for a bed. But in the morning she says he has to go back on the streets. But does he? The lady who works in the halfway house takes him home and finally he has a place where he belongs.

Stephen Michael King has written a touching story about needing to belong. We know this from the beginning, because the nameless stray dog 'belonged to no-one'. We soon find out what not belonging means for this little dog—hunger and nowhere to sleep. The unhappiness of not belonging is resolved by the end of the story because now the dog 'knows where he belongs'.

Repetition of key words stress for us that this little dog has good qualities from the beginning. He is brave and fast and smart when he lives on the streets and when he plays with his new family he is still brave, fast and smart. The qualities that make him a survivor make him a great friend as well. Similarly, the dog is called 'mutt' from the beginning.

The angry man who sends him away calls him a 'mutt' but uses the word unkindly. When he moves in with his new family, the dog is called Mutt Dog with kindness and affection. He is still the same dog, but the pictures show us that all that was wrong has been made right and he is valued for the dog he is.

Stephen Michael King keeps his story about a homeless dog from becoming overwhelmingly sad and serious by including lots of humorous visual touches in his soft ink and watercolour illustrations.

Our empathy for Mutt Dog is heightened by the way he is drawn. He is small, cute and scruffy which makes him look all the more helpless and innocent. At the beginning of the story the city buildings dwarf him and he walks with his head and tail lowered.

Teaching Notes

1. Life on the streets of the city is hard for Mutt Dog. Talk about what he eats and where he sleeps. Is it a dangerous life? Does anyone take any notice of him?
2. All through the story there are people who, like Mutt Dog, have nowhere to go. Talk about what they are doing in the pictures. Why do they need the halfway house? What does it give them? Do you think that they might have good qualities like Mutt Dog has?
3. When the lady from the halfway house takes Mutt Dog home, how is his life different?
4. People come by their pets in all sorts of ways. Talk about how each of the children in the class got their pet and who decided on its name. How they met their pet would be a good topic for writing a story or making a picture.

5. Mutt Dog doesn't just get a home, he also gives a lot to the family he lives with. Discuss with the children what their pets give to them. If they don't have a pet, it could be someone else's pet that they know.
6. By the end of the story, Mutt Dog's whole life has changed. But has Mutt Dog changed? What is different about him? What is the same?
7. Mutt Dog's life is changed because of one kind lady. She could have ignored him like everyone else did, but she didn't. Do you think it is important that people are kind to animals and to each other? Can doing little things make a big difference in other people's and animals' lives? What does the lady get in return for being kind to Mutt Dog? Describe something little that someone has done for you that makes you happier.