



Teachers' Notes DOG TALES

EMILY RODDA

Teachers' Notes written by Kate Rowe

OMNIBUS BOOKS

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INTRODUCTION

Dog Tales is a funny chapter book for younger readers. Looking at life from a dog's point of view, the story is about the adventures of several dogs and one goat who live in the same street and are friends. It is in the form of interlinked short stories, with continuing strands running through the book as a whole.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Rodda's real name is Jennifer Rowe. She was born in Sydney and completed an MA (Hons) in English Literature at Sydney University in 1973. She worked in publishing for many years, as an editor and then a publisher at Angus & Robertson, before becoming the editor of the *Australian Women's Weekly* magazine in 1988.

Always a keen reader and writer, Emily began writing children's stories in her spare time to entertain her young daughter Kate. She submitted her first manuscript to Angus & Robertson using a pseudonym — her grandmother's name, Emily Rodda — to make sure that she got an honest opinion of her work from her colleagues. This book, *Something Special*, won the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award, as did four other of her books in subsequent years: *Pigs Might Fly*, *The Best-Kept Secret*, *Finders Keepers*, and *Rowan of Rin*.

A full-time writer since 1992, Emily Rodda has published over 90 books. In recent times she is best known for the popular Deltora Quest fantasy series which has sold more than any other Australian series, has been made into a successful animated TV series in Japan, and is published in over thirty countries around the world.

In 1995 Emily Rodda won the prestigious Dromkeen Medal. The judges of the award said of her that she 'maintains a prolific writing schedule, continues to provide a role model in promoting children's literature, and still spends many hours sharing her love of books with children and educators'. She has also won many Kids' Choice Awards across Australia. She has won two Aurealis Awards, for Deltora Quest Series 1 and also *Deltora Book of Monsters* with Marc McBride in 2002, and for *The Wizard of Rondo*, the second book in her *Rondo* trilogy, in 2008. Emily has also written eight mysteries for adults under her real name, Jennifer Rowe. She has four children, and lives in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. For further information please consult Emily Rodda's online biography at <http://www.emilyrodda.com>.

WRITING STYLE

Dog Tales is written in a light, funny, positive style, and is a gentle book that will especially appeal to quiet students and those who love animals.

BEFORE READING THE TEXT

Before reading *Dog Tales*, students could discuss their own pets, and what they think their pets get up to when their owners are not at home.

READING THE TEXT

The teacher might like to read the first chapters to the class, and ask the first comprehension questions orally, either for students to work on alone or in pairs, or as part of a class discussion. The teacher could continue to read the text, or ask the students to continue reading on their own.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TEXT

Students could answer these questions orally, alone or in pairs, or as a written task to be handed in. In some cases the questions may spoil the story, so you might like to hand them out only after everyone has finished the relevant chapter.

Chapter 1:

- Start a Character Chart. Draw three columns, with one heading each: Name, Appearance, Personality. Fill in details throughout the book for each new dog that you read about. For example, in chapter 1, you might put 'Scruffy' in the Name column, and 'small, with white raggedy hair' in the Appearance column. Sometimes the dog's personality will be mentioned, but sometimes you'll have to give your own opinion after reading all about them.
- What does Scruffy the dog have in common with Mavis the goat? Why does this scare her?
A) Scruffy likes to eat green things, like apples, grapes and cabbage, and she is the same colour as Mavis. She is scared that she might actually be a goat, not a dog, and will have to go and sleep in a shed in Mavis's field, instead of in her own home.
- What breed of dog is Gina? What breed of dog does she think the Maxes are?

A) Gina is a labrador. She thinks the Maxes are a mix of beagle, dachshund, spaniel, terrier, and a few other things.

Chapter 2:

- Gina talks about her 'Pet', Caroline. Who does she mean?
A: She means her owner.
- Which four of the friends believe in the Sausage Appearing Spell?
A: Barney, Scruffy, Gina and Mavis.
- Who doesn't believe in the Sausage Appearing Spell, and how do they explain the time the Sausage appeared in Barney's bowl?
A: The Maxes don't believe in the spell. They think Barney's Pets, Bert and Alice, put the sausage in Barney's bowl when Barney wasn't looking.
- What does Mavis want to add to her field, and why?
A: Mavis wants to plant a tree in her field, for shade, and also so the birds will have somewhere to perch and stay off her head.

Chapter 3:

- What TV show do the dogs like to watch?
A) 'Dog Hospital'
- Why doesn't the phone work at Barney's place?
A: Barney's owners didn't pay the phone bill, because Mavis ate it.
- What was really wrong with the 'poisoned' dog, and who is he?
A) The 'poisoned' dog had a stomach ache after eating scraps from Barney's garbage bin, and food hidden under Barney's food bowl. He is really Garbage Guts, the dog who lives down the road behind the Long High Wall.

Chapter 4:

- Why are the dogs annoyed at the start of this chapter?
A) The dogs are annoyed because their neighbourhood news says that Garbage Guts stole food from them and they did nothing to stop him.
- Describe what the Creature in Barney's yard looks and smells like.
A) The Creature is small and blue, and stands on its hind legs. It has huge blank eyes, a small mouth and no hair. It is wearing a thin silver suit and is about the size of a young Pet (i.e. a child). It smells of petrol, flea soap and lizard.
- Why has the Creature come to Earth?
A) The Creature wants to claim Earth for the Alliance of Zern.
- How do Max 1 and Max 2 trick the Creature into thinking that Earth is not a nice place?

A) Max 1 and Max 2 tell the Creature that it rains all the time on Earth, and that the frogs never stop singing. They say that's why they have fur coats, and why their ears hang down. They say it's a miserable place and he is welcome to take it.

Chapter 5:

- What is the big news among the birds and other dogs of the neighbourhood at the beginning of Chapter 5?
A) The news is that Mavis has gone mad.
- What does Mavis think she can see?
A) Giant invisible frogs with big teeth.
- Who do you think does the best job of calming Mavis down?
A) Gina.
- What caused Mavis to act so strangely?
A) Mavis ate the flag of the Alliance, left by the alien in the previous chapter, and it has had a strange effect on her.

Chapters 6 & 7:

- What shocking thing does Scruffy notice when she comes back inside after playing ball with her Petlings?
A) Her couch has disappeared.
- In Chapter 7, why does Scruffy think has caused the bump on her head to grow? Do you remember something that happened in the previous chapter that would actually have caused her bump?
A) Scruffy thinks she is growing horns like a goat. In fact, the bump was caused by the ball that was accidentally dropped on her head by her Petling Reuben in Chapter 6.
- Why does Scruffy's Pet Julie come home early?
A) Julie comes home early so that the new couch can be delivered.
- '*Scruffy trotted home and let herself into the house through her special door*' (Chapter 7). In human words, what would we call a door that is just for a dog? How about a door that is just for a cat?
A) For a dog, this would be called a doggy door, or pet door. For a cat, it would be called a cat flap.

Chapters 8 & 9:

- Why is Barney upset that the Maxes' Pets have been cleaning up their old hen house?

- A) Barney thinks the hen house is haunted.
- How does Barney describe Speckles the hen?
 - A) Barney says Speckles was the most enormous, the most terrible and the most evil hen the world had ever seen, and that she was proud, wild and vicious.
- What do the dogs decide to do to cleanse the hen house, and what goes wrong with their plan?
 - A) They decide to spray the hen house down with hose water at midnight. Unfortunately by the time they do this, the hen house is filled with real chickens.

Chapters 10 & 11:

- How does Peck know it was the Dolan Street dogs who hosed the hen house?
 - A) Peck has found evidence that proves the dogs were in the hen house—items like Max 1's name tag, and a metal star from Gina's collar.
- Who comes to visit the hens?
 - A) The ducks from the park at the top of the hill come to visit the hens.
- What does Peck demand from the dogs after the ducks' visit?
 - A) Peck wants the dogs to dig her a pond for the hens to swim in.

Chapters 12 & 13:

- Why are the dogs frustrated at the beginning of Chapter 12?
 - A) There is lots of gossip about them being spread on the News every day.
- Why does Gina think other dogs like to gossip about the Dolan Street dogs?
 - A) Gina thinks the Dolan Street dogs are interesting to gossip about because they live away from the other dogs and are not well known to them.
- What is The Place of Good Smells, and how did it get its name? What do you think the Place would smell like to humans?
 - A) The Place of Good Smells is a small, pretty hollow just past the park, with a bridge over a muddy patch full of reeds. Pets sometimes dump rubbish in the muddy patch, and so over time the Place has developed lots of good smells for dogs. Humans would probably find the smell disgusting!
- What idea does Mattie have to help the Dolan Street dogs fight the rumours about them?
 - A) Mattie thinks they should start a new rumour, a good one, that makes the dogs look good instead of foolish.

Chapters 14 & 15:

- Why does Gina's pet Caroline suddenly go away?

- A) Caroline gets a phone call that causes her to leave suddenly. We don't know exactly what has happened, only that it has something to do with Caroline's friend Suzanne and her cats.
- Why is Gina scared of being in the house on her own?
A) Gina is afraid that burglars will come to the house while she is alone there.
- What actions does Gina take to protect herself against burglars?
A) Gina hides her lead, food bowl, brush, dog treats, dog biscuits and dog food. Then she hides herself under her rug on the couch.
- When Scruffy arrives at Gina's house, what misunderstanding causes her to think that Gina's house has been burgled?
A) Gina has hidden all her dog treats and food, but Scruffy doesn't know this. Scruffy sees the food is missing and thinks that burglars must have taken it.

Chapters 16 & 17:

- What false (but exciting) story about the Dolan Street Dogs is now repeated often in the local News?
A) The news story is about how the Dolan Street dogs attacked and drove off forty-three armed burglars, and saved Gina.
- At first Barney is not friendly to Raymond the travelling salesdog, but he seems to change his mind and become more friendly, offering Raymond a drink from his water bowl. What did Raymond do to make Barney change his mind?
A) Raymond praised Barney's house and Mavis's field rather grandly, which made Barney feel more friendly towards him.
- At first the Maxes are suspicious of Raymond, but they then become interested in buying a yellow ball from him. What does Raymond tell them that makes them really want to buy it?
A) Raymond tells them that Tiger down the road bought a ball, which makes the Maxes really want one too.
- Not including Scruffy's free gift, what items do each of the dogs buy from Raymond, and for how much?
A) Barney buys Mavis a blue scarf for five dog treats. Max 1 and Max 2 buy a yellow ball for three dog biscuits. Gina buys a silver necklace for six biscuits and four treats.
- What happens to each of these items? And what happens to Barney?
A) The blue scarf runs in the rain and dyes Mavis's hair blue. The yellow ball bursts on a bush—it is actually a balloon. The silver necklace turns out to be only painted silver, and the colour washes off in the rain. And Barney catches fleas from Raymond.

Chapter 18:

- Why is Scruffy so worried about what was on the news that morning?
A) She is worried that the birds and other dogs will be making fun of the Dolan Street dogs for having been fooled by Raymond.
- What kind of tree does Mavis finally decide on planting in her field, and where does the seed come from?
A) Mavis finally decides to plant an apple tree. The seed comes from an apple core that Raymond gave Scruffy.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES (AFTER READING THE BOOK)

1. ART & PERFORMANCE

- In *Dog Tales*, Janine Dawson's illustrations work together with Emily Rodda's words to tell the story. Now it's your turn. Find a part of the story that you like, and use illustration to show what happens. Your pictures doesn't have to look like Janine Dawson's, they should be in your own style. You could try drawing, painting, or collage.
- Draw a picture of your favourite character from *Dog Tales*.
- Using your illustrations or the ones from the book as a base, create puppets and bring a scene from *Dog Tales* to life, in pairs or groups. First you will need to make the puppets. An easy way is to draw your character (fairly big, perhaps the size of an A4 piece of paper), colour it in, and glue it to a piece of strong cardboard. The cardboard should be strong enough to stand up without flopping. Cut out the character shape. Glue or tape a paddle pop stick to the back of the cardboard, at the base, so you can hold your puppet upright. Next, you will need to make a stage. This could be as simple as a desk: students sit underneath the desk, holding the puppets up at desk level and making them speak. Or, if you have a bit of time, and you can find a big enough box, you could create a Punch and Judy style theatre for one or two students to stand inside at a time. There are lots of different sites on the Internet giving instructions on how to cut out and decorate a cardboard box theatre, (for example, some simple instructions at <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Puppet-Theater-from-a-Box>).
- Create a miniature 3D version or diorama of a scene from *Dog Tales*, using plasticine, clay, polyclay or even papier-mâché. You could try the scene where the dogs are talking to the alien, for example.
- Look carefully at the map in the front of *Dog Tales*. It is a map of the dogs' neighbourhood, showing all the places mentioned in the story. However, these

places have been named by the dogs themselves, based on things they think are important, for example: The Place of Good Smells, The Street Where the Fire Was. Choose a place you know well, like your house, street, neighbourhood, or school. Draw a map of this place, but rename the rooms/streets from a dog's point of view.

2. CREATIVE WRITING

- Imagine that you are in a place that you know very well: for example your home, your street, or school. Now imagine that you are seeing the world from a dog's point of view. Write a short story about your visit to this place as a dog! (If you have already drawn a map of this place in the Art section, you could use this map to give you ideas for your story.)
- Do you have a pet? Write a story about a fun adventure your pet might have when he or she is home alone. If you don't have a pet, you could write about someone else's pet that you know, or just invent one. It doesn't have to be a dog, it could be a cat, bird or even a lizard!

3. MUSIC

- Imagine there was a TV show made of *Dog Tales* and you had to write a theme song for it, that would play at the beginning of the show. Using any instrument, or just your voice, make up your own tune. If you'd like to put words in the song and don't know how, start by humming the tune to a song you already know and try changing the words.

5. DISCUSSION TOPICS and CLASS PROJECTS

- **DOG BREEDS:** How many breeds of dog can you list, on your own or as a class (e.g. labrador, pug, poodle, etc.)? Do you know how and why breeds develop over time? Do we know what breed some of the Dolan Street dogs are? After you have made your list of breeds, choose one breed to research further. Find out what it looks like, what its personality is usually like, its skills and talents, and anything else interesting about it. You might find a useful book in the library or at home, or do some research on the Internet (a small number of starter websites are suggested in the Websites section below).
- **CITY AND COUNTRY:** The Dolan Street dogs live in a very quiet, leafy street, away from the busy town. As a class, brainstorm and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of city life versus country life (for anyone, not just the dogs!).
- Barney thinks he can make a sausage appear in his bowl if he follows a particular set of actions. Is he correct in thinking this? Can you think of a word starting with

's' that means a belief that someone has that doing something in a particular way will bring good luck, or avoid bad luck?

(Teacher: Superstition). Superstitions aren't true, but they are often believed by large numbers of people, and vary according to your culture. A well-known Western superstition is that it is bad luck to walk under a ladder. Can you think of others? Are there any particular superstitions in your own family? (N.B. Emily Rodda's family has a superstitious belief that if you want it to rain, you should leave your car windows down!)

- The Dolan Street dogs have very different personalities, but they are true friends. Is that sometimes true of people, too? Discuss what friends do for one another (e.g. accept differences, offer loyalty and support in time of trouble). Find some examples in the book of how the Dolan Street dogs show their friendship (e.g. they try to help Mavis when she goes mad after eating the alien's flag; they try to help Barney attack the 'haunted' hen house, etc.)

FURTHER DISCUSSION/ACTIVITIES

- LANGUAGE: In one column, make a list of words and phrases used by the dogs. In a second column, write the human translations. For example, Pets = owners, Petlings = children, 'Gristle!' = 'Nonsense!' This task could be divided among the whole class in groups: each group could be given the task of finding the dog phrases in a particular chapter, and then a whole list could be compiled on the whiteboard.
- Following on from the previous task, students could consider how other animals might view the world, and how this would affect their language. What might a cat or a fish call its owner? Or, extending the exercise even further, what might a robot think of a human, if it had its own language?
- If you liked *Dog Tales*, write and tell Emily Rodda why. Or if someone in your class comes up with a question about the book that no one can answer, write and ask her about it! Don't forget to include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply. You can address your letter to the following address:
Emily Rodda c/- Omnibus Books 175-177 Young St Parkside SA 5063

FURTHER READING

Emily Rodda has written several other funny stories like *Dog Tales*. You might like to read *Bob the Builder and the Elves*, *Green Fingers*, and *Bungawitta*. Your school librarian will have further suggestions.

WEBSITES

Here are some starter sites for researching dog breeds, if you wish to use the Internet.

<http://www.purina.com.au>

<http://www.mydog.com.au> (This site has a fun breed selector quiz, but don't worry if you answer the questions and your own dog doesn't come up as an option! They are just suggestions.)

<http://www.petnet.com.au/dog-breeds>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dog_breed (for older students)

N.B. The Purina and My Dog sites obviously advertise their dog food brands as well as giving information.

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For information about Emily Rodda, including answers to frequently asked questions and a current booklist, please go to:

<http://www.emilyrodda.com> and

<http://www.scholastic.com.au>