**The PS Brothers by Maribeth Boelts**

Louisiana Young Reader’s Choice Nominee 2013

Grades 3 - 5

*Submitted by Angela Germany, Youth Services Consultant State Library of Louisiana*

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**SUMMARY**

Russell has been living with an Uncle because of family problems and Shawn’s family is very poor. The two best friends decide that owning a big mean dog will protect them from bullies and solve some of their problems. They spend time at the library reading about dogs and dream of having their very own. Russell and Shawn decide to raise money by getting paid to pick up other dogs’ poop. They call themselves the **Poop Scoop Brothers**. Through their business venture they stumble across an illegal dog fighting ring. IL: **MG** - BL: **4.8** - AR Pts: **3.0**

Hardback. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2010. 9780547342498. $15.00.

Paperback. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 2011. 0-547-57717-6. $5.99.

Ebook available.

**AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY**  
  
Barbara O’Connor lives in Duxbury, Massachusetts which is near Boston. She is married and has one son, two dogs, and one cat. She grew up in South Carolina. Mrs. O’Connor has always loved writing. She wrote poems and stories at a very young age. She loves children. She enjoys writing biographies because she likes to read about different people’s lives. She loves to research facts and turn them into stories about lives.  
  
**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**  
  
**Writing:**

* Students will come up with an idea for a business like the PS Brothers. They will name a service they, as kids, can provide or an item they could make and sell along with the prices they would charge.
* Students will research dog fighting, the harm it causes to the dogs, and the laws against it and write a short paper on the subject.
  + A good website to start them off with: <http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/dogfighting/facts/dogfighting_fact_sheet.html>

**Art:**

* Students can draw, paint or sculpt dogs or a special pet.
* **Pet Pellets:** Students create an imaginary pet food, analyze advertising techniques and propaganda, and design their own label for their pet food. Contains a link to the PBS site “Don’t Buy It,” which explores techniques advertisers use to trick the public:<http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/03/lp311-01.shtml>
* **Learn about famous dog-related works of art:** At <http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/lessons/early/pets-ArtImage.htm> you can find a lesson plan about Paul Gauguin’s painting *Still Life With Three Puppies.* This plan can be adapted for other dog-themed works of art if you so choose.
* **Craft:**

Students can make a dog related craft like the cute puppies made from yard here: <http://www.makingfriends.com/bug/yarn_bugs_animals.htm>.

**Science**:

* **Dog Breeds Research Project:** Have students pick one breed of dog (one breed per student) to research and present their report to the class. Students can also create a poster outlining the characteristics of their breed. Students can use Animal Planet’s Dog Breed Directory (<http://animal.discovery.com/breedselector/dogselectorindex.do>) or the American Kennel Club Breed’s (<http://www.akc.org/breeds/index.cfm?nav_area=breeds>)  
  to get started. This could be a group project.
* **Geographical Dog Show:** Students will learn why and how dogs were domesticated, why certain breeds perform certain tasks, and what parts of the world different breeds come from. They will create posters for different breeds for a “Geographical Dog Show” in the classroom:  
  <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/08/g35/dogsshow.html>

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Which one of the boys came up with the idea for the PS Brothers?
2. Why is Russell living with his uncle?
3. What is the living situation for Shawn’s family?
4. The boys make a list of customers not to go back to. Name one of the reasons they decide that.
5. Terry Grundel gives Russell more problems at school than anyone else. List some of the things Terry does.
6. What were some of the clues that Nick was doing something bad with the dogs?
7. Name some of the things on Shawn’s top-ten food list. What are some of your favorite things to eat?
8. At the beginning of the book, Russell and Shawn wanted a dog to protect them from the people who picked on them. What are some ideas that might work better?
9. Shawn and Russell name their business the PS Brothers because, even though they are not related, they feel as close to each other as family. Who are some people you know that are that close? Do you have any friendships like that?
10. At one point in the book, the students have to take state standardized tests. How do you feel when the time for big tests comes around?
11. When they needed money to buy a dog, Shawn and Russell start the PS Brothers. Have you ever had to raise money for something you wanted? What did you do? If you haven’t, what would you do in that situation?
12. Russell and Shawn got a lot of practice with some of the messiest parts of taking care of a dog. What sort of things do you have to do to take care of your pets? If you don’t have any, what does someone you know have to do?

Websites

Maribeth Boelts Official Site

<http://www.maribethboelts.com/>