

Educator Discussion Guide

Ellie's Story: A Dog's Purpose Novel

by W. Bruce Cameron

Louisiana Young Reader's Choice Nominee 2018
Grades 3-5

Submitted by Jennifer LaBurre, Student
State Library of Louisiana

ABOUT THE BOOK

Ellie is a German Shepard who has been specially selected by a police officer, Jakob, to be trained as a Search and Rescue dog. *Ellie's Story* follows Ellie's journey from young pup learning how to do Work and Find, some of her favorite commands, to a fully certified Search and Rescue dog. Ellie and her handlers, sad Jakob and unconfident Maya, are able to Find and help many people with a mixture of tragedy and joy as Ellie's story unfolds.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

W. Bruce Cameron was born in 1960 in Michigan. His first attempt at writing a novel was in the fourth grade and he made it to twenty-six pages and he sold his first story in high school for fifty dollars. He attended an all-male college in the Midwest where he served as the editor of literary magazine and student newspaper. After college, W. Bruce Cameron held a wide variety of jobs in order to support himself as a writer. Eventually he began an online news column which became widely popular. One column, "8 Simple Rules For Dating My Teenage Daughter" earned him attention and eventually inspired a television series in 2011. He has since written adult fiction books, including *A Dog's Purpose* from which *Ellie's Story* is derived.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at
<http://www.brucecameron.com/about>,
Accessed 22 August 2017.

OTHER TITLES IN THIS SERIES

Molly's Story: A Dog's Purpose Novel
Bailey's Story: A Dog's Purpose Novel

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Working Dogs

Share with students the many roles dog serve in our communities including police dogs, search and rescue dogs, therapy dogs, and so on. Discuss why dogs are used in such capacities and explore what breeds of dogs are commonly selected to be trained to serve in these capacities. For more information, see <https://www.cesarsway.com/about-dogs/roles/dogs-with-jobs>.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts:

Ellie's Story is unique in that it is told from the perspective of a dog. How would other stories be different if they were told from an animal in the story's point of view? Have students choose a commonly known fairytale or folk tale and tell the story from a potential animal's perspective and focus on what would be important for such an animal to include in the story. For example, if Cinderella had a cat how would he/she see the story?

History:

There is a rich history of military, service, and working dogs throughout history beginning in the early 20th century and continuing through the modern day. Explore this history with students! Assign groups of students to give presentations on how dogs have served in wars (including WWI, WWII, Vietnam, Korean, etc.) or local communities.

- For an introduction to the History of War Dogs see:
<http://www.uswardogs.org/PDF/History-of-MWD.pdf>
- For an introduction to service dogs see:
<https://assistancedogs.wordpress.com/2013/08/05/the-history-of-the-service-dog-part-i-ancient-humans-and-dogs/>

Social Sciences:

Reach out to members of your local community and invite one or a variety of working dogs and their handlers to come to your class and share information about these special canines. Discuss how these dogs and their handlers impact our society and local communities and have students write papers on these extraordinary animals.

Science:

Ellie makes an excellent service dog because of her keen sense of smell and hearing. Explore how the five senses, especially the sense of smell, hearing and sight, are heightened in certain animals and how this helps them serve as service animals.

See <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/dogs-sense-of-smell.html> for an extensive breakdown of how a dog's sense of smell operates. For ideas about introducing students to their senses consult <file:///C:/Users/Jenn/Downloads/Senses%20DL%20PreK-2.pdf> for some great ideas!

Art:

Ellie receives a medal at the end of the novel, one which she is not particularly impressed with. Have students design and construct their own medals for Ellie to be displayed in the classroom. Is there a way to make the medals more interesting to a dog like Ellie? What kind of medal would Ellie like to receive?

Vocabulary:

Tantalizing
Vicious
Peculiar
Delicious
Irritated

Anxious
Bewilderment
Determination
Exhaustion
Disguise

Certified
Retired
Delicate
Predator

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is the narrator of this story? How does this effect the story? Is it different from other stories you've read?
2. What kind of dog breed is Ellie?
3. Why does Ellie describe everything by smell and sound?
4. Why does Ellie think she is in charge of her litter? Is she really?
5. What sort of tricks does Ellie learn throughout the story? Why does Jakob teach her these things?
6. Why is Jakob sad? How does Ellie know he's sad?
7. Ellie has a bad dream – what is the significance? How does it factor into the story?
8. Why do you think Ellie nervous around water?
9. How does Ellie feel about Work?
10. Who are the other dogs Ellie comes in contact with? What's their Work?
11. How is the search for the missing girl from the mall different from the other Finds Ellie has done?
12. How is Maya different from Jakob?
13. How does Ellie like living with three cats?
14. How does Ellie like working with Jakob? How does Ellie like working with Maya? Does she like one better than the other?
15. In the aftermath of the earthquake, why does Maya ask Vernon to hide?
16. How does Ellie find the person amid the chemicals?
17. Why does the liquid hurt Ellie? Why does she need a bath? What happens to Ellie afterwards? Why?
18. What's Ellie's new Work? How does she like it?

ADDITIONAL WEBSITES

Ellie's Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESQVx5PY5sA>

A book trailer for *Ellie's Story* from Scholastic.

Q&A with W. Bruce Cameron, the Author of Ellie's Story

<http://www.torforgeblog.com/2015/03/11/qa-with-w-bruce-cameron-the-author-of-ellies-story/>

Q&A session with author W. Bruce Cameron on *Ellie's Story*.

Ellie's Story Activity Pack

<http://images.macmillan.com/folio-assets/activity-guides/9780765374691AG.pdf>

A packet for educators and teachers of classroom activities to go along with *Ellie's Story*.