

## **YHBA Novel Resource - Letters From a Desperate Dog**

**Young Hoosier Book Award Book**

**Letters From a Desperate Dog by Eileen Christelow**

### **Copyright**

October 2006

### **Publisher**

Clarion Books – a Houghton Mifflin Imprint

### **About the Author and Illustrator**

Eileen Christelow is the author and illustrator of many beloved children's books including the Five Little Monkeys series and the informational books, What Do Authors Do? and What Do Illustrators Do? Her early memories of books were those given to her as gifts, which she later alphabetized, loaned out to friends, and charged overdue fees! While she was an avid reader, she did not begin writing until 8<sup>th</sup> grade. After college, Ms. Christelow photographed buildings for architects and wrote photo essays for magazines. Inspired by her young daughter's choices at the library, she began writing again. Her first book was published in 1982 and she has been writing ever since. Ms. Christelow is constantly inspired by memories from her childhood, stories and conversations overheard, family stories, newspaper articles, and nursery rhymes.

### **Contact Information**

<http://www.christelow.com>

Email via Ms. Christ low's website

Request for signed books

[info@bookcellarvt.com](mailto:info@bookcellarvt.com)

Houghton Mifflin Company

215 Park Avenue South

New York, New York 10003

## Photo



### **Connections to the Book**

Eileen Christelow rescued a puppy from a local shelter and brought the dog home to her family. Emma, the new puppy, quickly found her place at the Christelow home. Many of Eileen's stories have characters based on Emma. This story is Ms. Christelow's first story about Emma – written from her point of view! On Christelow.com, Ms. Christelow says, "My dog, Emma, finally got her wish: a book about her! My challenge was to figure out how Emma could tell her story. A journal? A family photo album? What was her story anyhow? After many false starts, I decided to write some letters from Emma's point-of-view. Who was she writing to? It must be a canine 'Dear Abby'! That's when the fun began!"

### **Other Books Written and Illustrated by Eileen Christelow**

[Vote!](#)

[Where's the Big Bad Wolf?](#)

[Five Little Monkeys Go Shopping](#)

[Five Little Monkeys Play Hide-and-Seek](#)

[Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed](#)

[Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree](#)

[Five Little Monkeys Bake a Birthday Cake](#)

[Five Little Monkeys with Nothing to Do](#)

[Five Little Monkeys Wash the Car](#)

[The Five-Dog Night](#)

[The Great Pig Escape](#)

[Not Until Christmas, Walter!](#)

[The Robbery at the Diamond Dog Diner](#)

Jerome Camps Out  
What Do Authors Do?  
What Do Illustrators Do?

### **Awards**

Bank Street College of Education—A Best Children’s book of the Year  
IRA/CBC Children’s Choice

### **Art Medium**

Ink (pen, brush, chisel point dip pen,) watercolor, gauche, colored pencils, and pastels  
All of these mediums can easily be used in the classroom. If pastels, gauche or ink are not readily available, experimenting with watercolors, colored pencils, and dark markers or ink pens could replicate Ms. Christelow’s illustrations.

### **Annotation**

Written and illustrated by renowned author, Eileen Christelow, author of the Five Little Monkeys series, Letters from a Desperate Dog will delight animal lovers and pet owners. The story is told from the point of view of Emma, a dog, who is struggling with the amount of “barking” his owner George does. Seeking advice from Queenie, the columnist in the *Weekly Bone*, Emma decides to get a job to escape George’s tirades. Both Emma and George find that their friendship is much more important than anything else! With beautiful, bright illustrations and a comic-like layout, characters come to life through their actions and words.

### **Genre**

Animal Fiction

### **Point of View**

First Person

### **Theme**

Pets/Dogs, Advice, Friendship

### **Conflict**

Internal Conflict – Emma feels that her owner, George, barks too much and needs advice from Queenie, the advice columnist in the *Weekly Bone*.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Emma finds that once on her own, traveling with the cast of a play, she and George are better together.

## **Characters**

Emma – dog, lives with George, feels unappreciated by George

George – human, owner of Emma, feels frustrated with Emma’s behavior

George’s cat

Queenie – *Weekly Bone* advice columnist

## **Setting**

Present day

George’s house

Around town – Sidewalk Café, newsstand, library, theater, gas station

## **Interest Level**

Grades 1-4 Perma-Bound Resources

## **Reading Level**

2.4 Perma-Bound Resources

## **Booktalk**

Sometimes I wonder what my dog Oscar is thinking. If Oscar were the main character in this story, Letters from a Desperate Dog, by Eileen Christelow, maybe I would have a better idea! In this story, Emma, a mischievous dog is frustrated with her owner George. She thinks that he “barks” too much! So, in order to get some help, Emma emails Queenie, the dog who writes the advice column in the *Weekly Bone* newspaper. Emma gets some good advice and learns some things along the way! If you have a pet, or you like to read about animals that have human characteristics, this is a great book for you!

## **Discussion Questions**

### **Before Reading**

Have you ever needed advice?

Who did you look to for that advice?

### **During Reading**

Why does Emma say that George is “unreasonable?” page 5

If you did not have access to a computer to send an email, what would be another form of communication you could use? page 8

Why are the “Missing” posters so important to Emma? page 24

### **After Reading**

What did Emma mean in her last email to Queenie by saying that George is “unpredictable?”

What lessons did Emma learn from her adventures?

Did George learn any lessons?

## **Language**

unreasonable (page 5) senseless, foolish, silly  
advice (page 7) an opinion offered to guide  
breed (page 9) a kind, a group – Yorkshire Terriers are a breed of dog.  
nuzzling (page 9) to touch or rub with the nose  
useless (page 11) of no use  
unappreciated (page 12) not appreciated, not prized  
responsibilities (page 12) something that you are tasked with doing, in charge of  
vigilant (page 13) watching – possibly to detect danger  
evidence (page 17) items related to a crime, left behind  
misunderstood (page 19) not understood  
tirades (page 19) a length outburst  
amiable (page 20) pleasant, good-natured  
disposition (page 20) attitude  
auditions (page 20) the process in which one tries out for a play  
unpredictable (page 32) not predictable – unable to know what will happen

## **Indiana Academic Standards Met by Novel Content**

### Kindergarten Language Arts

- K.1.1 Identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book.
- K.2.1 Locate the title and the name of the author of a book.
- K.2.2 Use pictures and context to aid comprehension and to draw conclusions or make predictions about story content.

### First Grade Language Arts

- 1.2.1 Identify the title, author, illustrator, and table of contents of a reading selection.
- 1.2.6 Draw conclusions or confirm predictions about what will happen next in a text by identifying key words (signal words that alert the reader to a sequence of events, such as before, first, during, while, as, at the same time, after, then, next, at last, finally, now, when or cause and effect, such as because, since, therefore, so).
- 1.3.3 Confirm predictions about what will happen next in a story.

### Second Grade Language Arts

- 2.2.9 Use context (the meaning of the surrounding text) to understand word and sentence meanings.
- 2.2.10 Draw conclusions or confirm predictions about what will happen next in a text by identifying key words (signal words that alert the reader to a sequence of events, such as before, first, during, while, as, at the same time, after, then, next, at last, finally, now, when or cause and effect, such as because, since, therefore, so).
- 2.3.5 Confirm predictions about what will happen next in a story.
- 2.3.7 Identify the meaning or lesson of a story.

### Third Grade Language Arts

- 3.1.6 Use sentence and word context to find the meaning of unknown words.
- 3.1.7 Use a dictionary to learn the meaning and pronunciation of unknown words.
- 3.3.6 Identify the speaker or narrator in a selection.

Before		<u>Letters From a Desperate Dog</u> By Eileen Christelow	After	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		Dogs are well-behaved pets.		
		Pets can send emails.		
		It is important to spend time with your pets and help them understand the rules of the house.		
		If pets could talk, they might have complaints or gripes.		

## **Anticipation Statements**

### **Read-Alikes**

Vote! by Eileen Christelow

Where's the Big Bad Wolf? by Eileen Christelow

Five Little Monkeys Go Shopping by Eileen Christelow

Five Little Monkeys Play Hide-and-Seek by Eileen Christelow

Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed by Eileen Christelow

Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree by Eileen Christelow

Five Little Monkeys Bake a Birthday Cake by Eileen Christelow

Five Little Monkeys with Nothing to Do by Eileen Christelow

Five Little Monkeys Wash the Car by Eileen Christelow

The Five-Dog Night by Eileen Christelow

The Great Pig Escape by Eileen Christelow

Not Until Christmas, Walter! by Eileen Christelow

The Robbery at the Diamond Dog Diner by Eileen Christelow

Jerome Camps Out by Eileen Christelow

What Do Authors Do? by Eileen Christelow

What Do Illustrators Do? by Eileen Christelow

Pony Problems (Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew Series #3) by Carolyn Keene

Mr. Putter and Tabby Feed the Fish by Cynthia Rylant

Mr. Putter and Tabby Pour the Tea by Cynthia Rylant

Bunny Trouble (Handy Manny Series) by Susan Ring

Little Giant – Big Trouble (Dragon Slayers' Academy Series #19) by Kate McMullen

Author: A True Story by Helen Lester

Artist to Artist by Eric Carle

## **Across the Curriculum Connections**

### **Pets – Science and Social Studies**

Using fiction and non-fiction texts from the local library or from the school media center, students can research various kinds of pets: cats, dogs, birds, fish, reptiles, gerbils, hamsters, etc. Individually, students should choose a type of pet and make a list of the

items needed to care for that pet and a list of responsibilities that they would need to take on if they were the owner of that pet. Students should be given the opportunity to share their lists with the class upon completion. This task could easily be done at a literacy station during small group instruction in order to give each student adequate time with the texts.

#### Optional Resources:

Fiction Texts about Pets –

Pony Problems (Nancy Drew and the Clue Crew Series #3) by Carolyn Keene

Mr. Putter and Tabby Feed the Fish by Cynthia Rylant

Mr. Putter and Tabby Pour the Tea by Cynthia Rylant

Bunny Trouble (Handy Manny Series) by Susan Ring

Little Giant – Big Trouble (Dragon Slayers’ Academy Series #19) by Kate McMullen

Non-Fiction Texts about Pets –

Baby Pets by Margaret Miller

Puppy Training for Kids by Sarah Whitehead

My Pet Ferrets by Amy Gelman

My Pet Fish by Lori Coleman

My Pet Rabbit by Kristine I. Spangard

My Pet Rat by Arlene Erlbach

My First Guinea Pig and Other Small Pets by Linda Bozzo

Paper for lists

#### First Grade Science

1.1.3 Recognize that and demonstrate how people can learn much about plants and animals by observing them closely over a period of time. Recognize also that care must be taken to know the needs of living things and how to provide for them.

#### Second Grade Science

2.4.3 Observe and explain that plants and animals both need to take in water, animals need to take in food, and plants need light.

#### Kindergarten Social Studies

K.2.4 Give examples of how to be a responsible family member and member of a group.

### **Advice Columns – Language Arts**

Collect newspapers, or have a local paper donate papers to your classroom, having enough for each child to have several sections of paper, or an entire paper to himself/herself. Point out section headings and page numbers as well as daily/weekly reoccurring columns, such as the advice column. Students can do a number of activities searching for words/objects in the paper and cutting them out: spelling words, nouns, verbs, proper nouns, names, monetary amounts in advertisements, etc. Magnifying glasses could be provided for easier reading or to examine pictures. Older students could choose an article and summarize it for the class, discussing the main points and author’s purpose.

#### Optional Resources:

Newspapers  
Advertisements  
Magnifying glasses  
Scissors

Kindergarten Language Arts

K.1.3 Understand that printed materials provide information.

K.2.4 Identify types of everyday print materials.

Second Grade Language Arts

2.2.3 Use knowledge of the author's purpose(s) to comprehend informational text.

### **Resources**

*Moodle*, June 19, 2008, from <http://moodle.org/>

This course management system technology can be used with students to communicate online. Students can post responses to assignments, ask questions, or simply send a message.

The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash by Trinka Hankes Noble, DVD, animated 2004.

This amusing movie illustrated by Steven Kellogg will add another "problem pet" story to students' repertoire of knowledge.

Arthur's Pet Business by Mark Brown, DVD, animated 2003.

Another funny pet tale, author of the well-known Arthur series, Mark Brown delivers an animated version of his story Arthur's Pet Business. Arthur, the lovable aardvark, desperately wants a pet and attempts to prove his responsibility by taking care of others' pets.

### **Book Activities**

#### **Writing a Letter**

#### **Letter Writing**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**In the story, Letters from a Desperate Dog by Eileen Christelow, Emma sends emails to Queenie asking advice. Another form of written communication is a letter. Using the template, write a letter to someone in your family. Be sure to include both telling and asking sentences, capital letters at the beginning of each sentence, and punctuation marks at the end of each sentence.**

---

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_,

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Write a Story as a Comic Book**

After reading Letters From a Desperate Dog, help students examine the illustrations on pages 13-15. Also have students examine comics from the newspaper. Discuss the layout of a comic, narration, and dialogue. Students may use stories that they have already written, by themselves, or others and turn the story into a comic. If dialogue has not already been written, students may add dialogue that is appropriate for their illustrations. Layout is dependent on individual student choice. Students may use large sheets of paper, or draw each frame, then compile them onto a sheet of newsprint or other large paper.

**Indiana Academic Standards Met by Book Activities**

Kindergarten Language Arts

K.4.3 Write using pictures, letters, and words.

K.5.1 Draw pictures and write words for a specific reason.

K.5.2 Draw pictures and write for specific people or persons.

First Grade Language Arts

1.5.5 Write for different purposes.

1.6.6 Correctly use periods (I am five.), exclamation points (Help!), and question marks (How old are you?) at the end of sentences.

1.6.7 Capitalize the first word of a sentence, names of people, and the pronoun I.

1.2.6 Draw conclusions or confirm predictions about what will happen next in a text by identifying key words (signal words that alert the reader to a sequence of events, such as before, first, during, while, as, at the same time, after, then, next, at last, finally, now, when or cause and effect, such as because, since, therefore, so).

Second Grade Language Arts

2.5.3 Write a friendly letter complete with the date, salutation (greeting, such as Dear Mr. Smith), body, closing, and signature.

Third Grade Language Arts

3.5.3 Write personal, persuasive, and formal letters, thank-you notes, and invitations that:

- show awareness of the knowledge and interests of the audience.
- establish a purpose and context.
- include the date, proper salutation, body, closing, and signature.

## **Bibliography**

Barnes and Noble

[www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)

Houghton Mifflin

[www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com](http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com)

Eileen Christelow

[www.christelow.com](http://www.christelow.com)

Perma-Bound

[www.perma-bound.com](http://www.perma-bound.com)

Indiana Academic Standards

[www.doe.state.in.us/standards](http://www.doe.state.in.us/standards)