

YHBA Novel Resource
A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray
By Ann M. Martin
Scholastic Inc.
Apple Paperbacks

Skii Ficklin

About the Author:



Ann Matthews Martin became a teacher after graduating from Smith College in 1977. She later became an editor of children's books. She was inspired to write the story of Squirrel, the stray dog, after adopting her dog Sadie, whose mother was a stray. Martin has written many children's books, including The Babysitter's Club series, which she ended in 2000. She now writes single novels, most of which are set in the 1960's. Ann is a full-time writer and after many years of living in New York City, she now calls upstate New York her home.

Honors and Awards:

Corner of the Universe:

2003 Newbery Honor Book

2003 ALA Notable Children's Book

2003 Book Sense Top Ten Pick

Booklist Editors Choice

Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year

Book Links Lasting Connection

Horn Book Fanfare Book

NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People

2003 New Atlantic Booksellers Association Book of the Year Award (Children's Novel)

2004 Kentucky Bluegrass Award (Grades 6-8)

Belle Teal:

PW Best Book of the Year
Book Sense 76 Children's Pick
Child Magazine Best Book of the Year
IRA Young Adult Choice
NCSS/CBC Notable Studies Trade Book for Young People

The Doll People:

2002 Maryland Children's Book Award (Intermediate Category)

Leo the Magnificent:

American Bookseller Pick of the Lists
NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People
1999 Georgia Children's Book Awards (Grades K-3)
Pennsylvania Keystone State Reading Association Children's Book Award

Ten Kids No Pets:

1991 Indiana Young Hoosier Book Awards (Grade 4-6)
1991 Pacific Northwest Young Readers Choice award (Grades 4-8)
1994 Virginia Young Readers Program (Elementary)

P.S. Longer Letter Later:

ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers
Texas Lone Star Book

Snail Mail No More:

ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers
Parents Guide Children's Media Award

Annotation

The author describes how a stray dog lives. Ann M. Martin adopted the puppy of a stray dog. This was her inspiration for writing such a gripping tale. Squirrel is a stray puppy, born to a stray. Her brother, Bone, is the only other puppy from the litter to survive. The first weeks of her life are pretty easy. Her mother takes care of her and provides food. When Squirrel's mother doesn't return to their nest, the real issues arise. Squirrel spends the next few weeks with her brother, but once they are separated Squirrel's life becomes much harder.

As Squirrel starts out on her own, she discovers that she is a survivor. Once she meets a friend, she realizes she can be a caretaker, too. Squirrel starts to rely on her friend and that is when she is taken away. Her friend dies right before Squirrel's eyes. This leads to her first home, but that is short lived when the family moves and does not take Squirrel with them.

Finally, Squirrel meets a human with heart. Her new owner takes care of her and Squirrel takes care of her new owner. After such a hard life, Squirrel has a happy ending to her story.

In this book, Martin discusses the different type of treatments from humans and how the dog finds food and shelter. The descriptions of the dog's environment are those from the dog's point of view. These descriptions make the reader think about how animals are treated in general. Even though we really do not know what dogs may think about, this is a story that draws the reader into the brain of a stray dog. There are parts of this book that may be hard for some students. Any animal lover will be moved by the harsh treatment that some animals must face in this book.

The author describes how a stray dog lives. She discusses the different type of treatments from humans and how the dog finds food and shelter. The descriptions of the dog's environment are those from the dog's point of view. These descriptions make the reader think about how animals are treated in general. Even though we really do not know what dogs may think about, this is a story that draws the reader into the brain of a stray dog.

Genre: Fiction/Adventure

Point of View: The person telling the story is main character, the stray dog, Squirrel. This story is in first person.

Theme: The themes in this novel are perseverance and learning to trust. After Squirrel's mother does not come back to the nest. Squirrel and Bone must make their own way. They find that trusting humans is not always good. After being treated poorly, they are separated. Squirrel must then persevere on her own. She must learn to survive without the help and encouragement of her brother. Toward the end of the book, Squirrel encounters a nice human that takes care of her. It is hard to trust a human since she has been wronged in the past. This human is worthy of her trust and Squirrel finds that life is much easier when you can trust.

The Title: Very straight forward: This is the story of a stray dog's life

Conflict: There are many conflicts in this novel: Squirrel vs. the elements, Squirrel vs. humans, Squirrel vs. other dogs, Squirrel vs. other animals, Squirrel vs. hunger. The main

conflict is Squirrel is trying to survive. She wants to be safe from other animals and have food in her belly. The underlying struggle is companionship. Squirrel is much happier when she has someone with her, whether it be her brother, friend, or owner.

Resolution: The resolution comes when Squirrel finds her new owner, Susan. She protects her from the cold, provides safe shelter, gives her food when she is hungry, and provides companionship she has never experienced before.

Characters:

Squirrel- She is the main character, the stray dog.

Bone- Squirrel's brother that is taken away from her in a parking lot.

Mother- Squirrel and Bone's mother that never comes back to their nest.

Mine- the fox that lives on the Merrion property until she is killed.

Yellow Man- the cat that lives in the shed with Squirrel and her family.

The Merrion Family- the owners of the property that Squirrel is born on.

Matthias Merrion- the son of the owner of Squirrel's first home. He brings bone and Squirrel food and toys.

George – human who rescues Squirrel and Bone from the side of the road only to dispose of them in a parking lot.

Marcy- George's wife who rescues Squirrel and Bone from the side of the road.

Moon- a dog that resembles Bone. Squirrel's companion who is killed by a truck.

Robert –the owner of a store in Claremont, a town where Squirrel and Moon make their home one winter.

Lisa- the owner of a store in Claremont, a town where Squirrel and Moon make their home one winter.

Amanda- A girl from Claremont that Squirrel watches.

Sarah - A girl from Claremont that Squirrel watches.

Dr. Roth- The veterinarian that takes care of Squirrel after she is hit by a truck.

Rachael- The veterinarian's helper that takes care of Squirrel after she is hit by a truck.

Mr. Becker- The driver of a truck that kills Moon and injures Squirrel. He also adopts Squirrel as his summer dog.

Mrs. Becker- Adopts Squirrel as the Becker family's summer dog.

Margery – daughter of the family who adopts Squirrel as the Becker family's summer dog.

Donald- son of the family who adopts Squirrel as the Becker family's summer dog.

Susan McGrath- Squirrel's owner and companion who treats her very well.

Dr. Thompson- The veterinarian that Susan takes Squirrel to.

Mrs. Oliver- Susan's friend who does not believe she can take care of a dog or herself.

Setting

The story takes place during modern times, probably somewhere in the northern part of the United States or Canada.

Interest/Reading Level:

Reading Level: Grade 3-5

Interest Level: 8 years and up

Indiana Standards for Book:

Reading 3.1, 3.2, 3.3

Booktalk

Squirrel is a dog with many adventures. Some adventures were good and some were not. She starts life with the comfort of her mother and brother. When they become separated, the real adventure begins. Squirrel must learn how to care for herself through changing seasons and different environments. She must find food and shelter, which can be difficult for a stray. Life is hard for squirrel, but she is helped along her journey by two trusted friends.

Read how this courageous dog finds her way in a story told from her point of view. This is a touching tale that will melt any animal lover's heart.

Discussion Questions:

The House in the Country

Pre-Reading

What happens in the springtime? What types of places are safe for mother animals to have babies?

During

1. Why doesn't Mrs. Merrion want a dog? P. 6
2. Why did Mother pick the shed? P.8-9
3. Why did Mother not care about the boxes? P.9

Post-Reading

Draw a picture of the shed; include the animals that Mother encounters.

The Wheelbarrow

Pre-Reading

What are some of the hardships for a newborn animal? How do mother animals protect their babies?

During

1. Why did Mother toss the third puppy out of the wheelbarrow? P.11
2. What did Mother do when the big yellow cat did not return to her kittens for a long time? P.13
3. Why did Mother fear Mine? P. 15

Post-Reading

Write a short poem about Mine and her kits. It can be fictional or discuss what you already know about Mine. You will read your poem to a partner. Your partner will guess the form of poetry you have used. You may use all forms of poetry that we have discussed:

Free verse (vers libre)-

Poetry written in either rhyme or unrhymed lines that have no set fixed metrical pattern.

Haiku -

A Japanese poem composed of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables, usually containing a season word.

Name -

Poetry that tells about the word. It uses the letters of the word for the first letter of each line.

Narrative -

A poem that tells a story.

Rhyme -

A rhyming poem has the repetition of the same or similar sounds of two or more words, often at the end of the line.

Shape -

Poetry written in the shape or form of an object.

Mother

Pre-Reading

Discuss what humans mean to stray dogs.

During

1. Why does Mother nudge Bone and Squirrel out of the wheelbarrow? P. 17
2. Why was having the Merrion family there not a good thing? P. 21
3. Why did Mrs. Merrion not like Mine? P. 24

Post-Reading

Use the internet to look up foxes on www.Askkids.com. Find 3 facts about foxes you believe to be interesting. Share your facts with a partner.

Secret Dogs

Pre-Reading

What do you do when you are bored? What games do you like to play? Make a list of all the things you do. You can keep it for a time when you do get bored.

During

1. Why was Squirrel so hungry? P.27
2. Why was Matthias quietly calling the puppies? P.31
3. Why did Squirrel and Bone trust Matthias? P.32-33

Post-Reading

Group activity: Discuss ways you can help others trust you. What should you do for a friend to trust you? Make a list and select a spokesperson. Share your list with the rest of the class.

The Highway

Pre-Reading

Have you ever heard the phrase "if your friends jump off a bridge, would you?" Sometimes going along with the crowd is not a good idea. When is it a good idea? How are you a good influence?

During

1. When did Squirrel and Bone leave the Merrion Property? P. 35
2. Who would immediately forget about Squirrel and Bone? P. 36
3. What were the whoosh- whoosh sounds? P. 38

Post-Reading

Have you ever started out on an adventure? Write a short story about an adventure you have had.

Bad Dogs

Pre-Reading

What kinds of things do you need to care for a new puppy? What supplies? What food?

During

1. Did Squirrel want a new home? P. 43
2. Why were the puppies howling and whimpering in the middle of the night? P. 48
3. What made George say the puppies had to go today? P. 49-50

Post-Reading

Look at a pet store website. Find the cost of all the supplies needed to care for a new puppy. Add the cost to the supplies needed to maintain a puppy for a year. How much would it cost to keep a puppy for one year?

The Throwaways

Pre-Reading

If George does not want to care for the puppies, what should he do?

During

1. Why did the women take Bone? P. 53
2. What did Squirrel smell that made her happy? P. 56
3. What did Squirrel call the lights on the cars? P. 58

Post-Reading

Make a list of all the animal shelters in your area. Use the phonebook, the internet or anyone's personal experiences.

Squirrel Alone

Pre-Reading

What types of things happen in the fall? What about winter? How is winter harder for some animals?

During

1. Who did Squirrel think Moon was at first? P. 66
2. What did Squirrel and Moon feast upon the first night? P. 67
3. Why did Squirrel think Moon was there to stay? P. 67

Post-Reading

Make a list of feelings you think Squirrel might have had. Compare your list with a partner. Do you have the same list? Why or why not?

On the Move

Pre-Reading

Have you ever moved to a new house or town? Do you know anyone who has if you haven't? Why did they move?

During

1. Was the woman who saw Moon angry? P. 69
2. Why was Moon brave? P. 68-69
3. Why did Moon and Squirrel leave the woods? P. 70-71

Post-Reading

Draw a map of the woods and neighborhood that Squirrel has described.

The Fight

Pre-Reading

What do you do when you travel? Do you play games? Watch movies? Sleep?

During

1. How did Moon first get wounded? P. 75
2. Why did Moon and Squirrel stop suddenly? P. 78
3. What was wrong with the dogs that attacked them? P. 79

Post-Reading

Journal Prompt: Write a journal entry as if you were one of the other dogs. Discuss what you think Moon and Squirrel are doing.

Healing

Pre-Reading

Has anyone ever had a cut that required stitches? Why did it require stitches? How long did it take to heal?

During

1. What did Squirrel dream about? P. 83-84
2. Why did Moon nudge Squirrel? P. 85
3. What did Moon do for Squirrel? P. 86

Post-Reading

Think of a scene from another story when someone does something nice for someone else. In teams, act out the scene for the rest of the class.

Town Dogs

Pre-Reading

Do you celebrate Halloween? What types of costumes have you worn in the past?

During

1. What types of costumes did Squirrel see? P. 88
2. Why did they decide to stay in Claremont? P. 91
3. Why did the parade make Squirrel nervous? P. 98

Post-Reading

Think of a parade you have seen. What types of floats did you see? Make a parade float out of your craft supplies.

The Long Winter

Pre-Reading

Have you ever helped a stray animal? Fed birds? What happened?

During

1. What was the "Christmas preset for stray dogs?" p. 101
2. Why couldn't the dogs live on hamburger alone? P. 103
3. What did the men do with the poles? P. 105

Post-Reading

Discuss why the women put the food out for the dogs. Why did the men catch the dogs?

Moon

Pre-Reading

What had Squirrel and Moon learned in Claremont? How would that help them as they continued?

During

1. What happened at the house with the woodpile? P. 107
2. What did the boys and girls do to the dogs? P. 108
3. What were Moon and Squirrel chasing? P. 109

Post-Reading

Discuss what Moon's death means for Squirrel. Make a list of possible outcomes. Which outcome would be the best for Squirrel? Why?

Gentle Hands

Pre-Reading

Think of a time you were sick or hurt. Did you go to the doctor? What was the doctor like? How did he or she make you feel?

During

1. Where did the family take Squirrel? P. 115-116
2. Who was the woman in the white smock? P. 116
3. Why was it going to be expensive to fix Squirrel? P. 118

Post-Reading

Do you think the Becker's will be a good home for Squirrel why or why not?

Summer Dog

Pre-Reading

What do you think is the easiest pet to care for?

During

1. Why did Margery and Donald think Squirrel was tired? P. 125
2. Why did Squirrel get lonely? P. 127
3. Why did Squirrel decide to move on? P. 130-131

Post-Reading

Make a timeline with all of Squirrel's homes so far. Where do you think she has been the longest? Where was she the happiest?

Farm Dog

Pre-Reading

What types of things are on farms? What kinds of buildings? Where are farms usually located?

During

1. What were the hunters doing? P. 135
2. What did the horse do when he saw Squirrel? P. 136
3. Who were Hal and Jean? P. 137-138

Post-Reading

Write a letter to a friend as either Jean or Hal. Discuss what is happening on your farm.

The Scent of Bone

Pre-Reading

Have you ever had déjà vu? Have you ever had the feeling you had experienced something exactly the same way you were experiencing it now? How did that make you feel?

During

1. What was Bone smelling? p.140
2. Why was Bone hopeful? P. 140-141
3. What did Squirrel realize she had become? P. 143

Post-Reading

Group activity: Use the library or the internet to find books discussing aging of dogs. Find out why dogs age faster than humans.

Old Woman

Pre-Reading

What happens when people get old?

During

1. Why was there no trick-or-treating? P. 147
2. What did Squirrel dream about? P. 149
3. What did Squirrel finally think about to make her go into the house? P. 154

Post- Reading

Do you know anyone like the old woman? Are they real or fictional? Compare and contrast the old woman to the person you know. Make a list of how they are alike and how they are different.

Addie

Pre-Reading

There is a lot of research that says pets are good for older people and people who are sick. Why do you think that is?

During

1. Since Addie wasn't feeling well, where did she eat? P. 156
2. Who did Susan call? P. 158
3. What did Mrs. Oliver say? P. 160

Post-Reading

Journal Prompt: Sometimes people think that older people or children cannot do things just because of their age. Write about a time when someone did not think you could do something just because of your age.

Companions

Pre-Reading

Do you have a pet? What was it like the first night you brought your pet home?

During

1. What does Susan say every dog should start their day with? P. 163
2. How old is Susan? P. 164
3. How old does Dr. Thompson think Addie is? P. 171

Post-Reading

Draw a picture of Squirrel's (Addie's) new home. Include her toys and supplies.

Two Old Ladies/ Home

Pre-Reading

Of all of Squirrel's companions, who would you rather have as a companion?

During

1. What were Addie's favorite places to visit? P. 173
2. What did Susan let Addie do? P. 178
3. What did Susan need? What did Addie need? P. 181-182

Post-Reading

In *A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray* by Ann M. Martin, Squirrel lives in many different situations with different companions. Discuss Squirrel's personality during each of her situations. Where do you think she is the happiest? Where is she the saddest? Where would you be the happiest and saddest? Is it the same as Squirrel? How does Squirrel's personality change? When is she a leader? When is she a follower? How does Squirrel help others? How do others help Squirrel?

Squirrel with her family-

Squirrel with Moon-

Squirrel as Daisy-

Squirrel on her own-

Squirrel as Addie-

Indiana Standards for the discussion activities: 3.3,4.3, 5.3, 3.7, 4.7, 5.7

Vocabulary:

Barren p.3- unproductive; unfruitful

Burlap p.9- a plain-woven, coarse fabric of jute, hemp, or the like; gunny

Menace p.24- a person whose actions, attitudes, or ideas are considered dangerous or harmful

Entwined p.27- to twine with, about, around, or together

Terrain p.37- a tract of land,

Feral p.47- existing in a natural state, as animals or plants; not domesticated or cultivated; wild

Gingerly p.50- with great care or caution; warily

Tentatively p. 54- unsure; uncertain; not definite or positive; hesitant

Chickadee p.63- any of several North American birds

Rivulets p.65- a small stream; streamlet; brook

Predators p.75- any organism that exists by preying upon other organisms

Katydid p. 75- any of several large, usually green, American long-horned grasshoppers

Rheumy p.79- pertaining to, causing, full of, or affected with rheum

Vole p.86- any of several small mouselike or ratlike rodents

Chrysanthemums p.87- any of several composite plants of the genus *Chrysanthemum*

Foraged p.94- to wander or go in search of provisions

Fracture p.118- the breaking of a bone, cartilage, or the like, or the resulting condition

Coax.119- to attempt to influence by gentle persuasion

Contraption p.121- a mechanical contrivance; gadget; device

Carcass p.133- the dead body of an animal

Anticipation Guide:

Before		A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray	After	
Agree	Disagree	by Ann M. Martin	Agree	Disagree
		Dogs do not have many emotions.		
		All dogs like to have humans pet them.		
		All pet owners care about their animals.		
		If a human does not have a pet, they do not care about animals.		
		It's okay not to help a hurt dog.		
		Dogs and cats do not get along.		
		Stray dogs are afraid of people.		

Read Aloud:

A Dog's Life: The autobiography of a Stray by Ann M. Martin

p. 27

The air cooled, darkness fell, the stars came out and so did the bats, and still Mother did not appear. Bone and I curled into each other in our nest, our stomachs rumbling. I thought of the garbage heap, of the turkey and melon rind and cake, but Bone and I hadn't been outside in the nighttime by ourselves yet. Besides, surely Mother was on her way back to us.

All that night Bone and I slept on the burlap sack, slept with our legs and tails entwined. I could feel Bone's breath on my neck. It was our first night without Mother, and it seemed very long.

In the morning when I awoke I saw Bone, three of the shed cats, and a mouse poking its head out of a flowerpot, but no Mother, I knew that she was not going to come back at all.

Before: What happens when you get lonely? What do you do? What happens when you are hungry? Who makes food for you?

After: Why did Squirrel not want to go get food? Why did she think her mother wasn't coming back? What do you think happens to Squirrel and Bone?

p. 106

Caught! The dogs were caught in the ropes. They yipped and barked and fought, jerking back and forth, pulling and snapping. But the men held tight to the poles and tugged the dogs toward the van. They threw open a door at the back and hauled the dogs into cages. Then they slammed the door shut. They stood in the lot, poles in hand.

"Do you see any of the others?" asked one of the men.

"Nope. They disappeared fast."

"They'll be back tomorrow. Or maybe tonight. Those people were feeding them at night, too. I think."

All right. Well, let's get these two to the shelter. We'll come back here later."

Before: What are some dangers that stray dogs face? How do they find food? When do stray dogs eat?

After: What were the men doing? Why? What is going to happen to the dogs they caught? Did the people feeding the dogs know they were in danger?

p.143

I was an old dog with black fur beginning to turn white, a filmy eye, bad hearing in one ear, and very achy bones in the shoulder and leg I had broken when I was young. I was weak, too, and when this newest winter arrived it was the coldest and stormiest one I could remember.

Before: What happens when dogs get old? What kind of life has Squirrel had?

After: What do you think will happen to Squirrel? Will she be able to survive the winter on her own? What types of things do old dogs need that young dogs do not?

Read Alikes:

The Call of the Wild by Jack London

This story is about a dog that is stolen from his family and forced to be an Alaskan sled dog. He is passed from owner to owner and finally becomes the leader of a wolf pack.

Wander by Susan Hart Lindquist

This is the story of a family whose mother has died. A stray dog unites a brother and sister, but while the neighbor shoots at the dog, he accidentally shoots the sister. This accident makes the father realize he needs to care for the remaining members of the family.

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen

This is the story of a boy who survives 54 days in the wilderness. He learns a lot about himself and how to deal with family issues.

Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

This is the story of an eleven year-old boy who finds a dog he suspects is being mistreated by its owner. He must face some tough decisions when the owner wants his dog back.

Black Beauty by Anna Sewell

This is the story of a horse that describes life in the early 19th century.

The Good Dog by Avi

Also written from the dog's point of view, this story is about a courageous dog that protects his family.

Laika by Nick Abadzis

This story is about an abandoned puppy that is destined for greatness in the Russian space program in the 1950's.

Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

This is the story of a ten year-old girl who befriends a big, ugly dog that gives her the courage to find out who she really is.

Across Curriculum Connections:

Social Studies:

- Draw a map of the woods and neighborhood that Squirrel has described.
- Make a timeline with all of Squirrel's homes so far. Where do you think she has been the longest? Where was she the happiest?

Indiana Standard: Social Studies 3.3

Math:

- Look at a pet store website. Find the cost of all the supplies needed to care for a new puppy. Add the cost to the supplies needed to maintain a puppy for a year. How much would it cost to keep a puppy for one year?

Indiana Standard: Math 3.2

Book Activities:

#1 In *A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray* by Ann M. Martin, Squirrel lives in many different situations with different companions. Discuss Squirrel's personality during each of her situations. Where do you think she is the happiest? Where is she the saddest? Where would you be the happiest and saddest? Is it the same as Squirrel? How does Squirrel's personality change? When is she a leader? When is she a follower? How does Squirrel help others? How do others help Squirrel?

Indiana Standards: 3.3,4.3, 5.3

#2 Journal Prompt:

Individual/Partner

Write a short poem about Mine and her kits. It can be fictional or discuss what you already know about Mine. You will read your poem to a partner. Your partner will guess the form of poetry you have used. You may use all forms of poetry that we have discussed :

Indiana Standards: 3.7, 4.7, 5.7

Bibliography:

www.scholastic.com- for all information on the author

www.dictionary.com- for vocabulary definitions

www.amazon.com – for read alike book descriptions

<http://www.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome2.html>- for Indiana Academic Standards,

http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/poetry_forms.php - for types of poetry

<http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/resources/resources/books.html> -for ideas involving pre and posting reading activities.