



RedRover Readers Program

**Discussion and Activity
Guide for**

Thinker: My Puppy Poet and Me

Written by Eloise Greenfield, illustrated by Ehsan Abdollahi



P.O. Box 188890 | Sacramento, CA 95818
916.429.2457 tel | 916.378.5098 fax | RedRover.org | info@redrover.org

RedRover Readers Discussion and Activity Guide for *Thinker: My Puppy Poet and Me*
© 2021 RedRover | Reprint with permission only.

Concepts

- What is the “perfect” place or home for a pet?
- What does it mean to be “yourself,” and how might pets play a role in this feeling?
- Why is communicating and expressing yourself important? Is listening to how others communicate and express themselves important? And if so, why? How is listening to pets different than listening to a friend? How is it the same?
- How are the ways you express yourself at home different or similar to the ways you express yourself at school?

Before Reading

Share the book cover with the students.

Ask:

- Who do you think “Thinker” is?
- What is a poet?
- Do you think a puppy can be a poet? Why or why not?
- How do you think a puppy can be a poet?
- What does it mean to express yourself? What are some ways you express yourself at home? What are some ways you express yourself at school?

Allow students to form their own ideas; they can revise their ideas as you read the story.

During Reading

Tell students there are 16 poems in the book. Together the poems tell a story. After listening to the first poem, have students predict what they think the story will be about.

Read the first poem, “Naming Me,” aloud.

Ask students:

- Do you think names are important? Why or why not?
- Do you think the name Thinker is more important to the boy or the dog?
- When the dog says, “A place that named me Thinker was the perfect place for me,” do you think the dog is really thinking about his name or other things?
- What makes a perfect home for a dog or other animal?

Reread the first poem. Ask students:

- Who do you think Jace is?
- What do you think this story will be about?

Continue reading the poems aloud. Emphasize the poems' titles as you read. Ask students to listen to how the words sound and how they feel when they listen to the poems. Ask students to think about how the titles help a reader understand the poem.

When you read the poem "Two Poets Talking," ask:

- What does **recite** mean? Dogs can't really recite or say poems. How else might a dog communicate how they feel?
- What do you think "word-music" is? How might "word-music" say more than words alone can express?

After the poem, "Tell Me Jace," ask:

- How do you think Jace feels in this picture, and how do you know?
- Why might Thinker be asking why some folks are mean and some are nice?

After reading the poem "You Can Go," ask:

- Why do you think Jace is worried Thinker will "talk" in school?

After reading "Pets' Day," ask:

- What do you think Thinker means when he goes to school and says, "Who am I if I am not myself?"
- Why does Thinker's poetry start all the other pets in the classroom singing and dancing? Do you think this is really about the pets or the kids?
- What does it mean to "be yourself"?

After Reading

Ask students:

- Who do you think is more of a "thinker," the boy or the dog and why?
- Describe the relationship between Jace and Thinker.
- Look back at the illustrations from the classroom on the pages after the poem "Pets' Day."

Ask:

- What do you notice about the illustrations? How do the students feel? How do you feel looking at the illustrations knowing all the kids and pets are being themselves?
- Where or when are you most yourself? Are you with a pet? Why might some people feel most like themselves when they are with a pet?

Extensions: Choose one or more

A. Write a haiku.

Reread the poem "Weather Haiku." Explain that a **haiku** is a three-line poem. The first line has words with five syllables. The second line has words making up seven syllables. The third line has words that add up to five syllables, like this:

Syllables: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

1. Cool out here to day,

RedRover Readers Discussion and Activity Guide for *Thinker: My Puppy Poet and Me*

© 2021 RedRover | Reprint with permission only.

2. but I don't need my sweater.
3. My hair is enough.

Think of a time or place you most feel yourself. Write your own haiku about this time or place.

B. Draw a picture of what you might think the “perfect” place or home for a pet might look like, and label parts of your drawing that help make it perfect for you and your family.

C. Draw a picture of a time or place where you most felt yourself. Add details that contribute to your feeling this way. Have students work with a partner to share their drawings and describe why this time or place makes them feel most like themselves. If the drawing includes a pet, ask them to describe how the pet adds to this feeling.

At the End of the Lesson

Ask students to reflect on the question, “What did you learn from today’s book and discussion that you didn’t know before?” You can do this with the whole group, in a sharing circle or related class meeting format, by having students fill out index cards, or other formats as you choose. We recommend that you have a variety of formats. After getting a sense of what the students learned, reinforce key themes that they mentioned, and perhaps add one or two that you would like them to keep in mind from the key concepts. Also discuss any follow up assignments or take home materials. Remember the students’ responses to the question, “What did you learn?” to add to your report about this reading.