

## Literature Circle Guide to *The Good Dog* by Avi

Use these questions and the activities that follow to get more out of the experience of reading *The Good Dog* by Avi.

### **Book Summary**

McKinley, a malamute, is a good dog -- he's reliable and trustworthy. Whether it's watching over the other dogs of Steamboat Springs, Colorado, or taking care of his human pup, Jack, McKinley never even thinks of letting anyone down -- until he meets Lupin. Lupin is a she-wolf and she's urging the dogs of Steamboat Springs to leave their domesticated lives and join her wild pack. And though she scares McKinley, he also finds himself drawn to her and the life of freedom that she offers.

### **Author Information**

Avi lives with his family in Denver, Colorado, and knows Steam-boat Springs well. The book is alive with the weather and the sights and smells of the mountains.

### **Suggested Answers to Literature Circle Questions**

1. In chapter four, Jack discovers that there are posters up all over town offering a reward of "two hundred bucks" to anyone finding Duchess. (p. 33) What is Jack planning to buy with the reward money if he finds Duchess?

**Jack tells McKinley about all the camping gear that he could get with the money. He lists a one-person tent and a sleeping bag. (p. 33)**

2. List three things that McKinley does in chapter 13 as he tries to communicate with Duchess, who is locked in the doghouse.

**Possible answers are found on pages 104-105, and include the following:**

- 1.) McKinley runs back the way he came, turns sharply at the next corner, and goes up Raccoon Way until he is behind the fence.
- 2.) Slinking down on his belly, pulling himself along with his forepaws, and kicking with his rear legs, he slithers forward along the base of the fence.
- 3.) He gives two short, low barks.
- 4.) When there is no response, he tries again, louder.
- 5.) He licks her nose.

3. Once Lupin has been injured, Aspen and McKinley have a difficult time finding a place for her to rest, away from the humans who are hunting her. Where does McKinley finally decide to hide Lupin?

**McKinley finds a hideout for Lupin in one of the houses on Fox Haven Way. (p. 142) It is the smallest house in the valley, and is only used by humans when the snow comes. McKinley decides it will be safe, since the humans would never think of looking for a wolf in one of their own houses.**

4. In his speech to the dog pack in chapter 30, McKinley says, "Steamboat dogs! I call upon you to recognize this human pup for the friend he is! Let this boy be voted an honorary dog!" What do you think it means to be an honorary dog? Is that a title you would like to have given to you? Why or why not?

**Students' answers will vary. According to Webster's Dictionary, the word "honorary" means "conferred or elected in recognition of achievement or service without the usual prerequisites." McKinley seems to be suggesting that because Jack helped free the wolf and helped McKinley live, he should be given some recognition of his service. Namely, he should be accepted as a dog by the dog pack (without fulfilling the prerequisite of actually being a dog).**

**Students who are animal lovers might say that they would like to have this title bestowed upon them. Others might not think it is such a great honor to be accepted by the animals.**

5. How would you compare the leadership skills of McKinley and Redburn? Does the dog pack make a wise decision at the meeting based on those skills? Explain.

**McKinley leads by example. He works hard and follows a code of honor, defending the dogs' dignity. (p. 232) The dog pack recognizes that McKinley is a good leader who watches out for others and often thinks about what they need before he thinks of himself. (pp. 36, 69) Based on what Duchess has told Lupin, it seems that many of the dogs think McKinley is a good leader. (p. 57) Before she leaves for the wilderness, Lupin tells McKinley he is a true head dog, which is a great honor coming from a wild wolf. (p. 200)**

**Redburn, on the other hand, tries to lead by lying to the other dogs. (p. 168) He challenges McKinley to a fight, with others watching, when he knows that McKinley is on his way home to take care of his human pup. (p. 110) This suggests that he puts his own needs before those of others. It also indicates that Redburn is vain, and likes to have other dogs watch him as he tries to take over the dog pack. He promotes the idea that complete obedience to humans is the only civilized way to live. (pp. 226, 228) When Redburn does not get his way, he resorts to taunts and snapping at the other dogs, until he finally scampers away. (pp. 231, 233)**

**Most students will say that the dog pack makes a wise decision in selecting McKinley to remain head dog.**

6. What are the effects of Lupin's visit to the civilized area of Steamboat Springs?

**As is often the case when wild animals and humans come into close proximity, the two do not mix well. Some results of Lupin's visit include:**

- 1.) Humans shoot at Lupin as they search for Duchess. (p. 96)
- 2.) Aspen reports that the dogs and humans of Steamboat Springs are nervous due to Lupin's presence. (p. 102)
- 3.) Redburn challenges McKinley for head dog position. (p. 110)
- 4.) The humans call a meeting at town hall to discuss what to do about the wolf. (p. 114)
- 5.) The humans plan to hunt for the wolf with the help of the dogs. (pp. 153-154)
- 6.) Mr. Pycraft is found to have possession of a gun without a license. (p. 222)
- 7.) The dog pack votes for McKinley to remain head dog of Steamboat Springs. (p. 237)

Chloe Gladstone

**Comment:** See above.

7. What do you think would happen if the dogs of Steamboat Springs decided to follow Lupin into the wilderness?

Chloe Gladstone

**Comment:** I actually thought this question was asking what would happen to the dogs, not what would happen in the town. That seems like an interesting aspect to consider. Should it be addressed in the answers? i.e. "The dogs are unable to survive in the wilderness and come back to the town." or "The dogs mix with the wolves and within a few generations they have no memory of their life as domesticated dogs." Or things like that.

**Students may make various predictions. Possible answers include:**

- 1.) The dog owners are sad that their pet are missing.
- 2.) Missing dog posters are placed all over town.
- 3.) Lots of people are out calling for their dogs.
- 4.) Dog owners speculate that UFOs have come to gather all the dogs from the town.
- 5.) The dogs are unable to survive in the wilderness and come back to town.
- 6.) The dogs mix with the wolves and within a few generations have no memory of their lives as domesticated dogs.

8. Imagine you are interviewing Jack about the dog pack meeting. What questions would you ask?

**Students' answers will vary. However, most students will ask a variety of who, what, when, why, where, and how questions. Some examples include: How did you know that a dog pack meeting was scheduled? What did it feel like to be the only human present at the meeting? Why do you think the meeting was called so quickly after the disappearance of Duchess? Who was in charge of conducting the meeting? When did you decide that the dogs were not going to harm you?**

9. Why do you think the author, Avi, chose to write from McKinley's point of view? How would the story have been different if written from someone else's point of view?

**Answers should indicate that stories written from a dog's perspective are not common. This technique makes *The Good Dog* different from the typical animal book. Physically, the reader experiences the action from a much lower frame of reference, since everything is viewed from the height of a dog's head. The reader is also given the opportunity to hear what the dogs and the wolf are saying to one another. The story also uses some unusual**

vocabulary, since McKinley does not know the words for many common household items.

**The story could change drastically if written from another point of view. If Redburn were the narrator, McKinley might no longer appear to be the hero of the story. If Jack were the narrator, the story would be missing a lot of the action that takes place at night or while Jack is school. These are the times when McKinley is working in secret to save Lupin. If the story were written from Lupin's point of view, the reader might be subjected to a much harsher view of humans and "man's best friend."**

10. Reread the description of Jack and McKinley's responsibilities in chapter two. At the end of the paragraph, we read that McKinley "took his job seriously." Do you think that animals actually feel responsibility? Explain.

**Students' answers will vary. Some will agree that animals feel responsibility, based on personal experiences with pets protecting them from danger. Others will refer to animals that are trained as seeing-eye dogs or watchdogs, and are responsible for their owners' welfare. A few students may disagree based on their experiences with animals. If they have been bitten by a dog, or if they have only had cats, they may not agree that animals feel responsibility. Students who have little experience with animals might not be able to provide personal examples to support their responses, but might make reference to things they have read or seen on TV.**

11. In chapter 25, McKinley asks himself to whom he owes his loyalty. He is not sure if his allegiance should be to the humans, the dog pack, the wolves, or himself. Are you ever unsure about what is right in a situation? What do you do when this happens?

**Answers will vary. Students should recognize that this question is based on values and/or moral issues. Most students will be able to describe at least one situation in which they had conflicting thoughts and were not sure about the right thing to do. They should indicate what they actually did in the situation. Possible reactions to difficult situations include talking to a trusted person such as a friend, parent, or teacher; thinking about the situation in different ways until the right choice presents itself; or simply ignoring the conflict and doing what they want. Some students may answer that they are not sure what to do in that type of situation.**

12. Suppose you could talk to animals. What kind of animal would you choose to talk to, and what would you and the animal say to each other (in human language)?

**In most cases, students will choose to talk to their favorite kind of animal. Those with pets at home may wish to talk to their own pets. Conversations will vary greatly, and can be about any subject. Students should write the**

**animal’s side of the conversation so that it indicates—directly or indirectly—what it is like to be that kind of animal.**

13. What might have happened if Redburn had been elected head dog? How might the outcome of the book’s events have been different?

**The reader is led to believe that Redburn would not have made a very good head dog. When Redburn is first introduced, he is described as extremely proud and arrogant, “expect[ing] admiring glances—from humans and dogs alike.” (p. 13) McKinley thinks that Redburn would prefer to be human. (p. 14) Later, Redburn says “[i]t’s smarter to do what humans want you to do. Makes life easier.” (p. 73) This indicates that if Redburn had become head dog, he would have done just what the humans wanted, including helping the hunters track down Lupin. Also, Duchess would probably not have been allowed to follow the wolf. Overall, Redburn would have attempted to please the humans rather than thinking of what was best for the dog pack.**

14. In chapter three, Duchess tells McKinley that “[Lupin] believes that it’s time we stopped living with people. Time to be independent, to get back to the wild the way we once lived.” How would the world be different for humans without dogs as pets?

**A world without dogs as pets would be drastically different for many animal lovers. Students may recognize that we would no longer have “man’s best friend,” and would lose the emotional connection that dogs can provide. People would not have a pet to take out for walks and exercise. There would be no watchdogs, seeing-eye dogs, search-and-rescue dogs, or police canine units. Kennel owners and dog groomers would lose their jobs.**

15. The book’s title and final sentence contain the same two words: “good dog.” How would you support the claim that McKinley is a good dog?

**Answers will vary. Students should cite examples from the text where McKinley makes good choices and other characters praise him. For example, McKinley decides to exhaust Jack to keep him from finding Duchess. He is attempting to protect both Duchess and Jack. (p. 47) Aspen says to McKinley, “You watch out for everyone but yourself.” (p. 36) At the end of the book, McKinley promises to talk to the dogs about going to live in the wilderness, and he intends to keep his promise. (p. 186) McKinley always does the right thing and looks out for others, which makes him a “good dog.”**

Chloe Gladstone

**Comment:** It seems like there should be a lot of other concrete examples from the text to list.

*Note: These questions are keyed to Bloom’s Taxonomy as follows: Knowledge: 1-3; Comprehension: 4-6; Application: 7-8; Analysis: 9-11; Synthesis: 12-13; Evaluation: 14-15.*

**Activities:**

1. Draw a map of the trip that McKinley and Jack make to the pack meeting in the middle of the night. Illustrate and label points of interest along the way.

**Main points of interest that should be included on the map can be found in chapters 29 and 30. (pp. 219-225) The journey includes the following: Jack's bedroom (the starting point), a trip through the quiet town (students can use their imaginations and descriptions from other parts of the book), crossing the river bridge, going past the place where people ride horses and bulls (a rodeo ring), circling the field where the pups hit balls with sticks (a baseball field), a building where people with snow-glanders gather (a ski lodge), an area called Howl Hill where a noisy machine pulls people to the top of the hill (a ski lift). Most of the dogs, including McKinley, sit at the foot of the hill for the pack meeting.**

2. Being a dog, McKinley does not know what many common human objects are called, so he invents names for them. For example, he talks about "eating sticks" (silverware), "a human pup" (a boy), and "staring papers" (books). List some of the names that McKinley has come up with and what objects they refer to. Then identify ten common school objects and invent descriptive names for them that McKinley might use. Write a short story from the point of view of McKinley, using your new terms.

**Students' answers will vary. Some examples of vocabulary from the book include "tall bowl" (drinking glass), "Jack's female" (mom), "pile of staring papers" (newspaper), "drinking something steamy" (coffee), "loud truck that came for the food people wished to share" (garbage trucks), "daily gathering place" (school), "the talking thing" (telephone).**

**Common school objects that students might come up with names for include pencils (writing sticks), crayons (colored writing sticks), teacher (female who talks all the time), or lunchbox (box for carrying food). The new vocabulary and the short story are limited only by the students' imaginations.**

3. Contact your local humane society or animal shelter to find out what can be done to prevent cruelty to animals. Create a presentation to share with your classmates.

**Presentations may take various forms, including PowerPoint presentations, posters, brochures, letters to the editor, newspaper articles, creation of Web sites, bulletin boards for the school hallway, etc. Some students may wish to extend their presentations to include action outside the school, such as volunteering at the humane society, starting a club to protect animals, collecting supplies for the humane society, or joining Humane Teen.**

**Selected Books by Avi:**

*The Book Without Words*

*City of Light, City of Dark*

*Crispin: The Cross of Lead*

*The Secret School*

*The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*

*Who Stole the Wizard of Oz?*

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