



That's the power of this program. It engages kids in a new way. Even if just for an hour, all the fear, all the self-consciousness, all the resistance just fade away.

Reading to Dogs—How a Loyal Listener Can Help

Lisa Papp

Lisa@LisaPapp.com

This is not your mother's library.

Who came up with that image anyway—drab, stale shelves with librarians shushing customers. Nonsense!

Today, not only do you find colorful rooms, and innovative librarians, if you're lucky, you might also find dogs.

I know because that's what happened to me! When I first discovered the Read-to-Dogs program at my local library, I was immediately hooked. First of all, dogs don't often wander into the library. Second, thank goodness someone decided they should. On that day, I saw fourteen dogs. Big dogs, small dogs, purebreds, and lovable mutts. All were calm, gentle, and ready to be read to.

But reading to dogs is not just a novelty or a fad for animal lovers. These dogs are working, and they make a difference where it's needed most—in children's lives.

Reading out loud was not my favorite thing when I was young. I disliked anything that brought attention my way, so reading aloud was definitely not enjoyable. Because of that nervousness, I would get hung up on some of the words. I remember feeling that I wanted to just disappear.

Given the choice, of course, I would have stayed and read to a dog.

I have always known the calm reassurance of animals, especially as a child. I have counted them some of my best friends. When I saw this program and watched kids sidling up to their canine companions, I knew

I wanted to share this story. I wanted to try to capture the magic of what I was witnessing, both visually and in words.

On that first visit, I listened closely. It went like this:

Girl: "Can I read to your dog?"

Handler: "Sure. This is Boots. She was left outside at a shelter."

Girl looks into Boots's eyes, strokes her ears, and says, "They didn't want to keep her?"

"I don't really know," the handler explains. "It was raining, so the shelter named her Sprinkles. But when I adopted her, we thought Boots was a better fit."

Girl: "Boots—because of your feet." (Girl pats Boots's little white paws.)

Handler smiles: "She loves to hear you read. What story do you have?"

Girl proudly shows Boots her book, sits close, and begins to read.

That's a typical introduction. It never gets old. I know all the stories of the therapy dogs at my library. It never gets old because each child has a little different reaction. Maybe a little history they share with the dog. But each of the kids has just made a friend. One they care about. One they can count on. The stage is set. Now it's just friends spending time together.

No pressure. No scores. No have-to's.

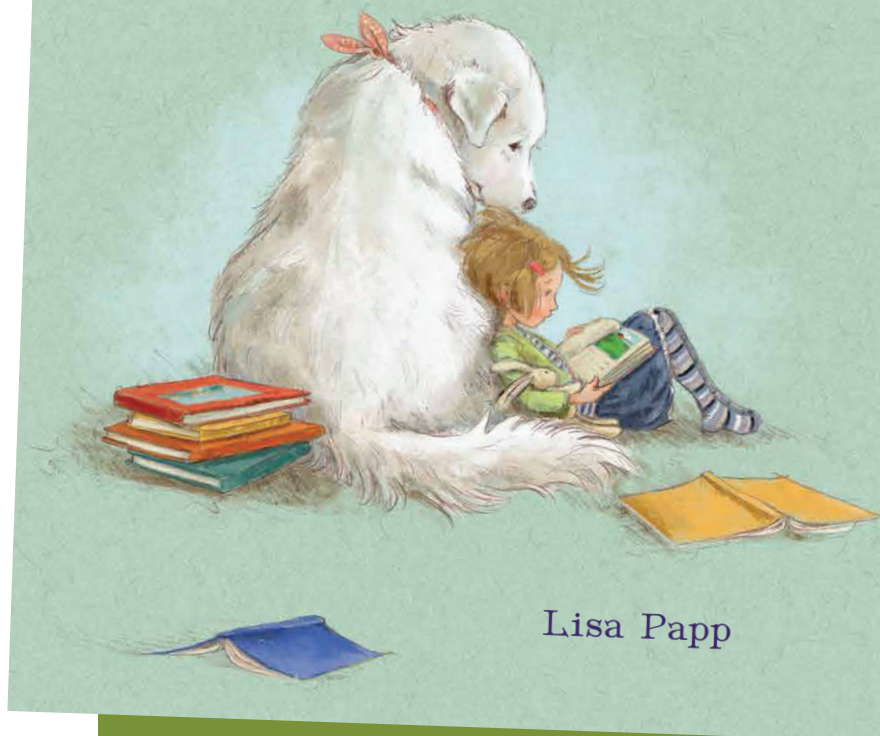
At this point, the handlers settle back. They tell me they are not to assist with the reading of words unless specifically asked by the child. In other words, the handlers just let the kids go. At their own pace. At their own level. It's *their* time with the dogs. And it's a magical time...of being loved...of being accepted...of being okay exactly as you are.

Exactly as you are.

That is rare in the world of learning and achieving. It's a very generous space. A wide open space. There's room for everyone, and no room for judgment of any kind. It's a vibrant learning ground, and the kids take right to it. They swim in it. They soak it up. They leave filled to the brim with the wonderfulness of themselves. What a very special gift.

One afternoon, I watched a nine-year-old girl spend the entire hour and a half reading a single Golden Book to a dog named Chloe. Her dad said she would not pick up a book

Madeline Finn and the Library Dog



Lisa Papp

*It's their time with the dogs.
And it's a magical time...of being
loved...of being accepted...of
being okay exactly as you are.*

at home, but she would come to the library for this.

That's the power of this program. It engages kids in a new way. Even if just for an hour, all the fear, all the self-consciousness, all the resistance just fade away.

The experience is wonderfully beneficial, not only for struggling readers, but also for children who are shy or feel different in some way.

My goal in creating *Madeline Finn and the Library Dog* (Peachtree 2016) was to capture some of that magic. I wanted to show Madeline's vulnerability, her frustrations, her embarrassment. And I wanted to show how

her emotions shifted when she met Bonnie, the library dog. It was fun to both write and illustrate the book because I had a chance to tell this story in two different mediums. Some things were better told in words, such as when Madeline Finn discovers, "It's fun to read when you're not afraid of making mistakes." That's a big truth. And the illustration of Bonnie and Madeline Finn gazing into each other's eyes—the moment Madeline Finn decides to trust Bonnie—couldn't really be expressed as well in words. I hope the combination of pictures and words reaches out to kids in a powerful way.

I have yet to meet a librarian with a therapy dog program who hasn't

witnessed breakthroughs. At a recent event, a school librarian told me of a mother in tears as her son read a Dr. Seuss book cover to cover to a therapy dog named Mr. Chips. I give so much credit to the teachers and librarians who are willing to give these programs a try. Thank you! And my heart is filled with gratitude for the wonderful handlers who give their time so generously, and share their therapy dogs with the children. You truly make a difference in young readers' lives.

You can't put a price on self-confidence. On self-acceptance. On understanding that you have a voice in the world. It goes beyond reading. These are gifts children will share with the world one day.

Lisa Papp grew up telling stories. With a notebook full of sketches, her early tales featured her cat, stuffed animals, and other nature-y things. Today, Lisa is still making up stories and painting pictures, but now they fill the pages of children's books. She has received awards for both her writing and illustration, including a 2011 National Parenting Publication Awards Honor book, a 2012 Storytelling World Resource Award, and the 2017 Children's Choice Book Award winner in the K–2nd-grade Book of the Year category. Lisa lives in Pennsylvania with her husband, Robert, also an artist, and three wildly creative cats—to whom she does read. You can visit her website at www.lisapapp.com.

And the dogs are perfect messengers.

These dogs create that safe and beautiful space of "I'm okay no matter what." And when you feel it, you believe it!

And when you believe it—anything's possible!

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Knowledge Quest, Publication No. 483-860, is published five times per year by the American Association of School Librarian, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611-2795. Annual subscription price, \$50. Printed in U.S.A. with periodical class postage paid at (Illinois). As a nonprofit organization authorized to mail at special rates (DMM Section 424.12 only), the purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding twelve months.

EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION

("Average" figures denote the average number of copies printed each issue during the preceding twelve months; "actual" figures denote actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: September/October 2017 issue). Total number of copies printed average 8,417; actual 6,704. Sales through dealers, carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: none. Mail subscription: actual 6,144. Free distribution actual 121. Total distribution average 8,417; actual 6,704. Office use, leftover, unaccounted, spoiled after printing average 483; actual 300. Total: average/actual 8,417/6,704. Percentage paid: average 77.3; actual 95.9.

INDEX TO ADVERTISERS

American Association
of School Librarians
(AASL).
Cover 2, 1, 5, 13, 19, 41, 53

Bound to Stay Bound
Books, Inc. Cover 4

Heifer International . . . 59

OverDrive. Cover 3