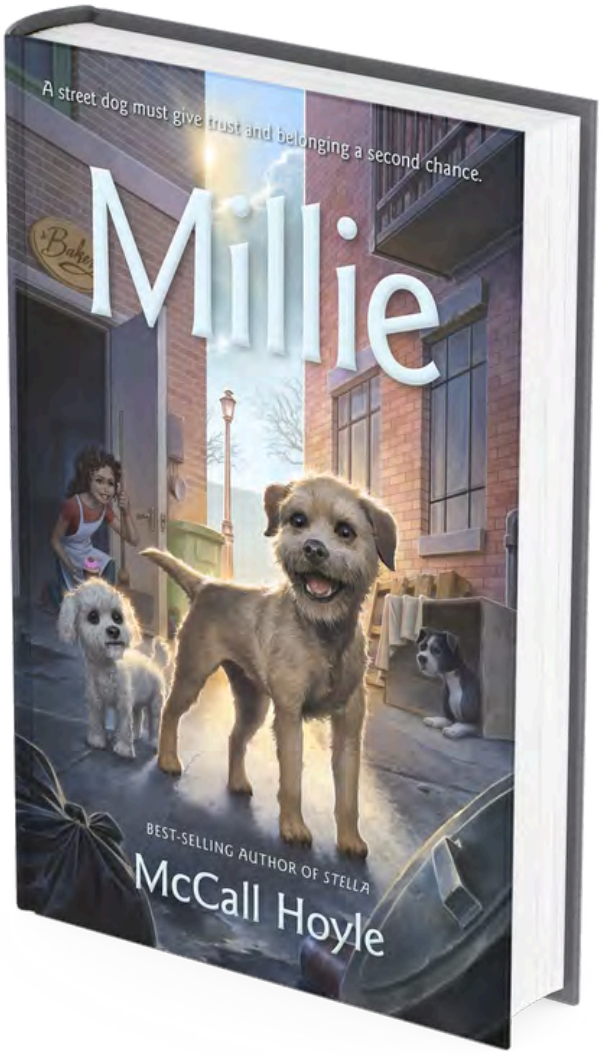
A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR Millie

ABOUT THE BOOK

From the author of Stella--nominated for fourteen Best Book of the Year state awards--comes the heartwarming story of a street dog named Millie and a young girl who are both dealing with abandonment and must give trust and belonging a second chance.



Millie, a feisty border terrier, lives on the streets. She has a keen sense for finding scraps of food, usually under the cover of darkness, and protects herself by barking and snarling. Most humans think she's aggressive when really she's just plain scared.

After a run-in with the dogcatcher, Millie is turned over to animal control. Thankfully, a special teacher, who also rehabilitates and rehomes dogs, rescues her. It's a win-win. Together, the dogs and the teacher's students learn emotional resilience, anger management, and other coping skills.

When one of the students, a struggling reader named Tori, shows a natural gift for dog training and working with fearful dogs, Millie is temporarily placed in her care. Tori may be young, but she knows a lot about anger, fear, and abandonment because her mother placed her in kinship care with her grandfather when she couldn't care for Tori.

Millie starts to wonder if Tori might be the person she's always wanted and lets down her emotional guard. But when her trust in Tori and her sense of belonging are challenged, Millie reverts to old habits--fleeing, hiding, and growling.

Can Millie and Tori embrace their training, trust in each other, and find a forever home together, or will Millie end up back on the streets?

Millie is an empathy-building novel for young readers who love dogs and is a tender portrayal of what it means to truly belong.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

McCall Hoyle is an award-winning author and teacher librarian. When she grows up, she'd also like to be a professional dog trainer. She writes heartfelt books for kids of all ages and believes one of the best ways to spread hope and share her heart is by writing about the special bond between dogs and their humans. When McCall isn't writing or teaching, you can find her with one of her four-legged friends training for agility, obedience, or dock diving—or perhaps chasing make-believe bunnies with them at a lure coursing event in the foothills of the North Georgia Mountains she calls home.

Millie

McCall Hoyle

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PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Take a minute or two and examine the cover of the book. Make some predictions about the characters and the story. Share with a partner. Choose which prediction you can support with the most evidence from the cover. Share the best prediction with the class.

2. Learning to trust is an important lesson or theme in Millie. How would you define trust in your own words? Think about some of the people you trust in your life. They might be parents, siblings, classmates, coaches, etc. Name two to three people that you can really trust. Explain why you trust them and what makes them trustworthy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the book, Millie overhears the family on the street discussing preparations for the upcoming snowstorm. The dad of the family says all he needs is food, family, and shelter to survive. Do you agree or disagree that these are a human's most important needs? What would you add to or take off the list? Explain.

2. Millie learns new skills in order to adapt to life on the street, at the shelter, and in an apartment with her new family. Think about a time you struggled to learn something new but eventually acquired the skill or mastered the content. What challenges did you face? How did you overcome the challenges? What kind of help did you receive from others? What did you learn about yourself from these struggles?

3. People who do not know Millie well often mistake her fear for aggression. Think about a time when a teacher, parent, or friend misunderstood your behavior. How did that feel? How did you handle the misunderstanding?

4. Jada tried to discourage Lee from rescuing Millie, but Lee trusted her own intuition and Bella's. Would you have trusted your instincts? Did Lee make a wise choice based on what she did or did not know about Millie? Explain.

5. Millie develops close relationships with Tori and Lee. Which human do you think helps Millie grow and learn the most? Explain.

6. Important characters in stories usually change throughout the story. How does Millie change from the beginning of the story to the end?

7. Books and stories include lessons, morals, and themes that the characters learn and internalize. Millie learns several important lessons over the course of the story. Which lesson or theme do you think is the most important? Explain.

8. Pick one of your favorite scenes in the book that does not include an illustration. Using specific details and examples from the story, explain the scene to a partner or draw a picture of the scene to share with the class.

9. When Tori's class reads *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane*, they discuss what it means "to be known." What do you think it means "to be known." How does true belonging feel? Explain.

10. Anne Frank was a Jewish girl who kept a diary about her experiences in hiding during the Holocaust. She witnessed firsthand horrible acts committed by some humans against others. In spite of that, she still believed "people [were] basically good at heart." Do you agree? Why or why not?

ACTIVE READING THROUGH READING STRATEGIES

1. **Summarizing**: Pretend one of your classmates has been absent, then summarize the last chapter you read for him or her. Pick which parts of the chapter are most important to share to help your classmate catch up quickly. Leave out small details that are not important to the overall story or chapter. Did your summary focus on an important story development, important traits of a certain character, or something else? Explain your decisions on what you included or left out of your summary in a small group or to the whole class.

2. **Visualizing**: Reread one of your favorite scenes in the book. Think about all the things that Millie can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel in the scene. Then draw a picture. Be sure to include specific details from the text. Find a partner and explain what details you chose to include from the story and why.

Created by McCall Hoyle, M.Ed.
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EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. **Poetry:**
Reread the poem Tori wrote about Millie on pages 170 and 171.
   1. What do you notice about the way the poem is written? (ie: How long are the lines? What kinds of words does Tori use at the end of each line? What parts of speech are those words? Do the lines rhyme? Does she use repetition?) What else do you notice?
   2. Using Tori's poem as a model or mentor text, write a poem of your own about something unexpected that has made a positive difference in your life. Share with your teacher, a classmate, or the whole class.

2. **Power of Dogs:**
Dogs have worked beside humans for thousands of years. They have helped humans hunt for food, protect property and farm animals, and have even pulled carts and sleds loaded with goods. Some dogs still have important jobs like herding sheep or keeping airports safe.

   With a parent or teacher, research dogs with jobs. One great place to start is the American Kennel Club website and the article "Fifteen Unique Jobs Only Dogs Can Do." Have students pick one dog job, then pair up with a partner who chose a different dog job. Students can then take turns being the expert and sharing what they learned about their particular dog job

3. **Narrative Writing:**
Because the story is told from Millie's point of view, readers only see, hear, and feel what Millie experiences, which means they miss out on many of the experiences of Little Pup and Big Guy when Millie is separated from them.

   Pick either Big Guy or Little Pup. Imagine what was happening with either Big Guy or Little Pup while they were separated from Millie. Make a bulleted list of what they might have experienced and seen and smelled and felt during their separation. Write a scene or story from either Little Pup or Big Guy's point of view. Since you are writing from the point of view of a dog, make sure to include lots of sensory details and imagery that pertain to smells.

   Share your writing with a partner and/or the class.

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