Reader's Guide to Stella by McCall Hoyle

About the Book:

Even dogs deserve a second chance.

Ever since she was a puppy, Stella was trained to use her powerful beagle nose to sniff out dangerous chemicals and help her handler keep people safe. But during a routine security inspection, Stella misses the scent of an explosive. The sound of the blast is loud and scary. Unable to go back to work because of her anxiety, Stella is retired as a working dog.

When a young girl named Cloe wants to adopt Stella, the beagle knows this is her last chance to prove her worth. But how? When Stella smells a strange chemical inside Cloe's body, a scent that surges just before the girl has a seizure, Stella's nose makes the connection. But how can Stella warn her new family without them thinking she's having an anxiety attack? How can she convince others that she can be a new kind of service dog and hopefully save Cloe's life?

Told from Stella's perspective, this story is about a special dog who must find the courage to overcome her fears in order to help save a young girl with epilepsy.

Discussion Questions and Topics:

1. Readers use a wide variety of strategies to comprehend what they read. One of those strategies is making predictions about what will happen next in a book or story. Have students predict what life will be like for Stella in the weeks and months after the story ends. Students should provide examples from the text to support their predictions. (CCSS 4-5.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4A)
2. Stories have themes or lessons. Have students explain one of the lessons that Stella learns in the story. Have students explain how the lesson applies to them personally by using examples from the text and from their own lives. (CCSS 4-6.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2)
3. Another strategy readers use to help understand a story is visualizing. Ask students to visualize a scene in the book that really created a movie in their heads. Have students explain that scene in detail using examples from the text. (CCSS 4-5.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4A)
4. Readers also make connections when they read. They make connections to themselves and to the world around them, and they make connections between what they are reading and other books and movies. Have students brainstorm a list of books and movies that remind them of *Stella*. Have students explain how those stories are the same or different using specific examples from both examples. (CCSS 4-6. ELA-LITERACY.RL.9)
5. Readers often ask themselves questions as they read and then continue reading to answer their questions. Have students jot down a list of things that they wondered about or had questions about as they read *Stella*. Then have students share one question with a partner. If time allows, have a few students share their questions with

the entire class and spend a few minutes discussing as a large group. (CCSS 4-5.ELA-LITERACY.RF.4A)

6. *Stella* is interesting because it's told from a dog's point of view. Have students explain how the story would have been different if the story had been told from Cloe's or any other human's point of view. Remind students to use examples from the text to support their explanations. (CCSS 4-6.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6)
7. Main characters usually grow and change in a story. Have students explain how Stella changed from the beginning to the end of the story. Remind students to use examples from the text to support their explanations. (CCSS 4-5. ELA-LITERACY.RF.4A)
8. One of Cloe's favorite books is *Charlotte's Web.* She loves the line where Wilbur says, "It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer." Have students explain in their own words what it means to be a true friend. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1)
9. All stories have turning points where things go from bad to good or good to bad. Have students list some of the major turning points in Stella's story. Remind students to use examples from the text to support their answers. (CCSS 4-6.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1)
10. Stella and Nando are both good dogs that truly love their people. Have students explain how Stella and Cloe's relationship is like Nando and Esperanza's. Have students explain how they are different. Remind students to explain using examples from the text. (CCSS 4-6.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3)
11. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt constantly tried to make the world a better place for other people. She delivered speeches and wrote books and is known for many wise sayings, including, "You must do the thing you think you cannot do." Have students explain what they think the first lady meant by this advice. Have them explain how Stella follows this advice. Have students brainstorm a list of ways they could apply this advice to their own lives. (CCSS 4-6. ELA-LITERACY.RL.10)

Extension Activities:

1. **Painting with words.**

   Explain to students how writers use imagery and sensory details to create pictures, sounds, and smells in their readers' heads. Have students draw a picture of the farm where Stella and Cloe live. Make sure students include details that come directly from the book. Have students share with a partner which details they chose and how each detail appeals to one of the five senses. (CCSS 4-6.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1A)

2. **Dogs with jobs.**

   Teachers might find it helpful to research some interesting dog jobs before assigning this activity. One great resource is "Working Dogs Doing Jobs Only Dogs Can Do" on the American Kennel Club website www.akc.org.

   Help students understand the importance of service and working dogs. All the dogs in this book have important jobs. Stella's first job at the airport is sniffing out explosive chemicals. She eventually puts her nose to use by alerting Cloe to oncoming seizures caused by her epilepsy. Nando herds sheep, and Gus is a livestock guardian dog. Have students read articles or review kid-friendly websites about what other types of jobs dogs can perform. Have students create a slide with a picture of a dog breed and a brief summary of the job typically performed by that breed. Have students share with a partner or the whole class how this job is helpful to humans. Remind students to explain using their own words, not using the words from the resources they used to gather information. (CCSS 4-6.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5)

3. **Once Upon a Time.**

   Explain to students that stories are narrated by a point-of-view character. Remind students that *Stella* is unusual because it is told from a dog's point of view.

   Have students spend five to ten minutes imagining themselves as one of their own pets or as another animal in the book such as Nando, Gus, or Oscar. Have students imagine this animal in a new place or performing a new task. Remind students to jot down ideas as they pop into their heads. For example, they could imagine what their own dog might think the first time he saw the ocean or what Oscar might think the first time he tastes tuna fish. Then have students write a two- to five-paragraph story recounting the event or experience, making sure they write from the point of view of the animal. (CCSS 4-6.ELA-LITERACY.W.3A)

About the Author:

McCall Hoyle lives in the foothills of the North Georgia Mountains with her children and an odd assortment of pets. She is a middle school teacher and librarian. When she's not reading, writing, or teaching, she's probably playing with or training one of many dogs. You can learn more about her at mccallhoyle.com

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