

WRITE BACK: DOG IN THE PLAYGROUND

Dog in the playground by Allan Ahlberg
Guidance notes by Lorraine Harrison

These imaginary letters concerning events or issues in narrative poems are designed to elicit a written response. They can be used by teachers simply as a stimulus for KS2 children to write back in role as the recipients. This would require an explanation of who the recipients might be and some work to ensure that the written reply is appropriate. It would also involve the children in some close scrutiny of the events in the narrative poem.

However, the most effective way to use such letters is to incorporate them into some drama work where children take on the roles of the recipients in a more active way. This not only provides scope for more imaginative written work, but also encourages emotional engagement, which has greater potential to motivate further reading and support recall.

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For more ideas on using drama and information on Lorraine's children's novels:

Red Snow and Angel's Child – visit her website larrainesharrison.com

You can also follow her on twitter [@larrainesharri3](https://twitter.com/larrainesharri3)



ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO DOGS

R.S.P.C.D Complaints Dept.

Investigation of an alleged incident of cruelty to a stray dog

Location of incident - local primary school

Dear head teacher

We are investigating an alleged incident of cruelty to a stray dog, in your school playground. We are not able to divulge the name of the person who made the complaint, but we can tell you that it came from someone outside your school, who witnessed the incident in the playground. We have also spoken to other witnesses who live near the school.

Under the law, we have the power to prosecute anyone who is cruel to defenceless animals. We understand from our witnesses, that a stray dog was taken into school by one of the pupils. It is not advisable to approach stray dogs, as they may be dangerous, and it is definitely not advisable to let pupils take them into school. You should have called the RSPCD and we would have arranged for the dog to be removed safely. The situation now is that the dog has disappeared and could cause problems again.

The witnesses say that the dog must have been tied up somewhere inside the school but then got away. The witnesses could not see what was happening inside the school, but heard children and staff screaming and shouting at the poor dog. It is alleged that a large group of children and several staff chased the poor frightened dog out into the playground and pelted it with stones to make it go away.

The dog was last seen running out of the playground gates in a very distressed condition.

We are very surprised and shocked by these accounts, but by law we must give you the opportunity to tell your side of the story.

We need your account(s) in writing at the earliest opportunity.

Please provide as much detail as possible, as you may need to defend yourselves should we decide to prosecute.

Please send your detailed account(s) to the town RSPCD office and mark it for the attention of The Complaints Department.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

B. Smith
RSPCD Investigations Officer

Drama activity

Introduction

- Read the poem to or with the children a couple of times, to familiarise them with the sequence of events.
- Explain that this forthcoming drama work is designed to help them understand the poem in greater detail.
- Tell the children that, when the drama begins, they will be asked to imagine that the school in the poem was their school, and that they were the children who were involved with the dog incidents. Tell them that they will also be asked to imagine that you were a teacher who was not at the school on the day the dog arrived. In this role, you will be asking them to tell you what happened and what they saw.
- In preparation for this, ask the children for a couple of suggestions as to what they might have seen, but make it clear that whatever they say must fit in with what it says in the poem. You may want to make it clear that the dog didn't attack anyone or make a mess anywhere.
- After listening to a couple of suggestions, allow the children a few minutes working in pairs or threes, to make up something they saw in connection with the dog at school that day. Tell them to fold their arms when they have decided. When a few children are ready, stop the activity.

The drama activity

- Explain that you will start the drama using the word *Action* and stop the drama at any time by using the word *Freeze*.
- On the word *Action*, start the drama in role as the teacher. Tell the children beforehand that you will use a scarf or tie as a sign when you are in role. In role as the teacher, tell the class that you have an important letter to read to them, but before you read the letter you would like to know what happened on the day the dog came into school, because, as they already know, you were out of school yesterday and missed it.
- Ask a few children to talk about what they saw and react sympathetically, making sure you act as if you have not heard anything about the dog before.

Introducing the letter and writing the reply

- After a few children have told their stories, introduce the letter with some gravity. Read it twice and/or allow them to see a copy before discussing it in detail. Allow some discussion and then suggest that they spend the next lesson writing their replies. Then stop the drama using the word *Freeze*.
- Explain that they can now take time to write the statements, as if they were the children in the poem. Statements can be written by individuals, pairs of children or by groups in shared writing. Finally let the class help you to compose a covering letter to send with the statements and then place everything in an envelope addressed as requested in the letter.
- After a few days, write the children another letter as if it is from the RSPCA, accepting the statements and withdrawing the allegations. Congratulate the children on the accuracy of their statements.