



OMNIBUS BOOKS

Category	Picture book
Title	Octopuppy
Author/Illustrator	Martin McKenna
Extent	32 pp
Age	4+
ISBN	978 1 74299 015 6

Teachers' Notes

Octopuppy

Written and illustrated by
Martin McKenna

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About the Story

Edgar works hard to get his pet octopus, Jarvis, to start acting like the dog he wanted. But, after embarrassing Edgar at the Dog Show with his *undog*-like behaviour, Jarvis runs away. That's when Edgar realises Jarvis is special and wants him to come back. Edgar searches near and far ... and still no Jarvis. Will they ever be reunited?

Octopuppy is a touching and richly illustrated story about acceptance and appreciation of others.

About the Author/Illustrator

Martin McKenna is a freelance illustrator based in the UK. Starting out with work for fantasy & horror RPG fanzines in the 1980s, he has also illustrated game-related material including covers and internal illustrations for 22 of the *Fighting Fantasy* series from Puffin Books/Wizard Books. Martin's own books include *Digital Fantasy Painting Workshop*. He also does concept and production art for games, and for film and TV, most recently *Gulliver's Travels* for 20th Century Fox.

This is the first picture book that Martin has written and illustrated. His first picture book for Omnibus Books was *The Gift* by Penny Matthews.

Study Notes for Teachers

1. *Octopuppy* is an excellent resource for teaching children how to create meaning from the visual features within books. Rereading the story a number of times will give children the opportunity to learn new things with each reading.
 - On the first reading just show children the illustrations so they can form their own meaning and ideas about what might be happening in the

story. Ask if they have any questions and discuss ideas and feelings prompted by the story.

- Ask the children what they thought the book was about. Could they relate to elements of the story and the main characters? How does Edgar treat Jarvis? How does Jarvis respond? Is the conflict between Edgar and Jarvis resolved?
- When you read the book, ask children to pay close attention to the pictures. Use these questions as a guide to prompt discussion about what can be learned from the illustrations:
 - Can children recognise the emotions of the characters in each illustration? How does the author/illustrator show how the characters are feeling?
 - What sort of dog did Edgar want? How does he feel when he first sees Jarvis?
 - Does Jarvis make a good dog? Should Edgar expect him to be like one?
 - Edgar is very happy when Jarvis manages to sit like a dog. How does Jarvis feel? How do we know this?
 - At the Dog Show, what are the different emotions experienced by: Edgar and Jarvis, the other contestants, the children in the audience, and the adults in the audience?
 - Look at the illustration of Jarvis and Edgar heading home after the Dog Show. How does this picture make you feel? How are the colours different to those used in the previous pages? Why do you think these colours have been used?
 - Look at the illustration of Edgar mentally comparing ‘the best Octopuppy in the world’ to other dogs. In Edgar’s opinion, what are some of Jarvis’ strengths? What are some of your own strengths?
 - How does Edgar search for Jarvis?
 - Can you identify the sea creatures in the pipes? What is happening in the bottom left corner of this picture? What do you think might happen next?

- What visual elements have been used to show feelings of happiness and joy at the end of the story?

2. *Octopuppy* is a great text to talk about pets.

- Display pictures of wild animals and popular domestic pets around the classroom. Include images of animals that fit into both categories, like cats, dogs, and birds. Ask the children to name the various types of animals displayed. Can they think of reasons why certain animals have become pets and others remain wild (e.g. body size, food requirements, temperament and other needs)? Why have some animals, like dogs and horses, developed a special relationship with humans?
- Have a class discussion about what pets require for a happy and healthy life – such as love, food, shelter, companionship, sleep and exercise. Remember to highlight the emotional needs as well as the physical requirements. Discuss what humans require for a happy and healthy life. Ask the children if they can see any similarities.
- Dogs are considered ‘man’s best friend’. Discuss ways in which dogs have served people through the ages (e.g. Guide Dogs, hunting dogs, police and rescue dogs).
- Organise a Pet Day for your class, year level or school (perhaps through the Student Representative Council). Children could:
 - come dressed up as an animal
 - bring a pet to school
 - hold a pet photo and/or pet drawing competition
 - arrange for a guest speaker from the RSPCA to come and share what the organisation does
 - bring a tin of pet food or old blankets/towels/sheets to donate to the RSPCA.
- You might like to consider getting a pet for the classroom. Class pets make great discussion starters for lessons on the environment, seasonal changes, lifecycles, behaviour, use of the senses, movement, communication,

conservation, domestication, adaptation, etc. They also provide an opportunity for children to gain firsthand experience in caring for a pet.

3. Use the range of emotions experienced by Edgar and Jarvis as a basis for activities and discussions about feelings.
 - Make a list of the emotions in *Octopuppy* and have children express these emotions through mime.
 - Ask children if they have been given something that was different to what they had asked for or were expecting. How did this make them feel?
 - Ask children how they would feel if, like Jarvis, someone was disappointed with their behaviour and actions. If they were unable to live up to the expectations of another person, what could they do? What else could Jarvis have done besides running away?
 - Ask children how they feel when they have been trying hard to please someone and the person doesn't seem to notice. How do they think Jarvis feels in this situation?
 - Talk about why we sometimes feel embarrassment and how we might deal with it. Ask children if there have been times when they felt embarrassed. How did they react? Why is Edgar embarrassed by Jarvis, and how does he behave as a result? How do Edgar's actions affect Jarvis?
 - Do you think the animals and people we care about like to know that they are appreciated? In what ways can we show our appreciation?

4. *Octopuppy* can be used for language activities and discussion.
 - Introduce children to adjectives and explain that they are describing words.
 - Ask children to use adjectives to describe some animals that live in the wild, such as a cheetah, elephant, and bear. Then ask them to think of adjectives for some domesticated animals.

- What adjectives can they think of to describe Jarvis (e.g. playful, clever, flexible). What adjectives could be used to describe Edgar? Make two lists on the whiteboard and compare these.
- Ask children about the different ways animals might know how humans are feeling (e.g. actions, voice volume and tone). How does Jarvis know when Edgar is angry or disappointed?
- This activity involves creating a poster for a lost pet. Have children write a description of a lost pet on one piece of paper and draw a picture of the pet on another. Mix these up and ask the children to match the description with the correct pet. Put the completed posters on display in the classroom.

5. *Octopuppy* is a great starting point for drama games and creative fun.

- Show children the pictures of Jarvis in costume at the beginning and end of the book, and discuss the different 'identities' (e.g. Dorothy (*The Wizard of Oz*), surf lifesaver, superhero).
- How well has Jarvis 'transformed' into each of these identities? Compare his facial expression, stance, clothing and props in each picture.
- Ask children to come to school dressed as one of these 'identities' and to try to remain 'in character' as they introduce themselves individually to the rest of the class.
- Animals cannot talk, but by observing their movements, sounds and expressions, we often know how they feel. Ask the children to act out these scenarios:
 - a budgie that is hungry
 - a dog that is ready to go on a walk
 - a cat that is frightened
 - a horse that is happy to see its owner
 - a dog that is on guard.

- Choose a scene from the book for the children to act out and then discuss further. They might like to select or create (if they have access to musical instruments) suitable 'mood' music to accompany their performance.
- Ask children to sit in a circle and play a game of 'Chinese' Whispers. Can they end up with exactly the same message, like the sea creatures in the pipes?
- Create a drawing, model or painting of a pet that you would like to have. Give your pet a name.