

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Junkyard Dog

by  
Erika Tamar

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### Book Information

Erika Tamar, The Junkyard Dog  
Quiz Number: 10642  
Knopf, 1995  
ISBN 0-679-87057-1; LCCN  
183 Pages  
Book Level: 3.3  
Interest Level: MG

Katie rescues a neglected dog from the local junkyard and learns to deal with her family problems.

**Topics:** Adventure, Rescue/Save; Animals, Dogs; Community Life, Animal Rights; Family Life, Growing Up; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3

### Main Characters

Crystal Katie's best friend

Jim Mary Ann's new husband and a carpenter, who teaches Katie to be self-reliant

Katie the principal character in the story; an eleven-year-old girl who befriends Lucky, the dog in the junkyard

Mary Ann Katie's mother

Meg and Damita girls in Katie's sixth-grade class

Mr. Farrow the owner of the junkyard, who neglects his watchdog

### Vocabulary

**blueprint** a photographic print, white on blue paper, used as a plan in building operations

**try square** a carpenter's tool used for marking and testing right angles

### Synopsis

When Katie was a baby, her father left her mother and her. For many years, her mother and she lived alone in project housing on the Mud Flats. When Katie is eleven, her mother remarries. Her new husband is Jim Grady, a carpenter. At first, Katie is uncomfortable around him and resents his presence in their small apartment. She doubts and distrusts

Jim, thinking that he, too, may eventually leave them.

Gradually, Katie's feelings for Jim change. When Katie's mother, Mary Ann, disapproves of her daughter visiting and caring for a neglected dog at a nearby junkyard, Jim comes through for Katie. He goes to the junkyard himself, checks out the dog Katie has named Lucky, then convinces Mary Ann that Katie should be allowed to befriend the dog. After Jim insists that Katie herself ask the mean Mr. Farrow for permission to feed Lucky, Katie's confidence is boosted when she follows through. Katie's respect and gratitude toward Jim grow when he guides her through her first building project--a doghouse for Lucky.

At the climax of the book, Jim assures Katie that he has no intention of ever abandoning Mary Ann and her. In fact, he reveals that he wants to build a better life for his family in Huntsville. Katie is especially pleased when he includes Lucky in their future plans. Later, the bond between Katie and Jim is strengthened when Jim tells of his plan to adopt Katie and she accepts.

A significant subplot to the book revolves around Daniel, a popular boy at Katie's school. Even though her girlfriends are boy-crazy, Katie is uninterested in their ploys to attract the opposite sex. However, when she learns that Daniel is concerned about Lucky, she sees him as special. Daniel helps her build Lucky's doghouse, and their friendship blossoms. However, her trust in Daniel wavers when she notices his reluctance to acknowledge her in school. Daniel admits that he is afraid to be teased about their friendship by their peers. Eventually, he does prove that he is a true friend when he stands up for Katie at Damita's party. The experience is a trust-building one for Katie, and her friendship with Daniel deepens.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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### Initial Understanding

When Damita tells Katie she needs attitude, what does she mean?

*She is referring to Katie's lack of self-confidence. She is suggesting Katie stand taller and walk with confidence.*

### Literary Analysis

How do Katie's feelings about Jim change during the course of the story?

*At first she sees him as an intruder, but as the story unfolds, she learns to trust and respect him.*

### Inferential Comprehension

When Jim explains that he wants to adopt Katie, why is Katie pleased?

*She has discovered that Jim has been looking out for her best interests and that he really does want to be a long-term husband to her mother and a father to her.*

### Constructing Meaning

Think of someone who reminds you of Jim. Describe how that person is like Jim.

*Jim is a kind, thoughtful and hard-working man. He is also honest and true to himself.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Literary Features** One theme of *The Junkyard Dog* is human cruelty to animals. The junkyard owner does not feed his dog Lucky, thinking the lack of food will make him a mean watchdog. Also, he doesn't provide shelter for the dog even in the coldest weather. Invite a representative from the Humane Society to speak to the class about abandoned and abused dogs in their community. Ask the representative to discuss the society's efforts to help these animals. Consider involving the class in a Humane Society fund-raising project.

**Comparing and Contrasting** When Jim, Katie's

stepfather, moves into the apartment, she feels uncomfortable around him and, in fact, distrusts him. However, at the end of the story, Katie feels pleased that her stepfather wants to adopt her. Ask the students to make a list of the faults Katie finds in Jim, then a second list of the qualities she admires in him. Ask the students if they think Katie may have misjudged Jim at the start. Why does she grow to accept him? What kind of man is Jim?

**Recognizing Feelings** When Katie and Daniel discover they both have an interest in Lucky, their friendship begins. The two visit Lucky and work together building a doghouse. Katie feels good about her relationship with Daniel until she notices he doesn't acknowledge her in front of their peers. She feels let down. Later, Daniel says he is fearful that his peers will tease him about being friends with a girl. Katie says, "You're supposed to stand up for a friend." Soon afterwards, Daniel defends Katie during a party, and their friendship blossoms. Students will identify strongly with this friendship theme. Ask them to write about a time when a friend may have disappointed them or what friendship means to them. Ask them to list the characteristics of a true friend, and create a bulletin board using the theme of friendship.

**Responding to Literature** Katie feels a deep responsibility toward Lucky, and she loves him. Though she's fearful of the junkyard owner, she approaches him because she's concerned for the dog. She refuses to buy candy for herself because she wants to buy food for Lucky, and she spends hours of her free time building a doghouse. In short, she makes sacrifices for the dog. Discuss what making sacrifices means. Ask the students if they have made sacrifices for others. Have others made sacrifices for them? What people have been admired worldwide for the sacrifices they've made?