

Ribsy

by
Beverly Cleary

Book Information

Beverly Cleary, Ribsy
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Interest Level: MG

A wonderful week spent as the mascot for a second grade class is just one of the adventures Henry Huggins' dog Ribsy experiences during the month he is separated from his home.

Award: State Award

Topics: Adventure, Lost/Abandoned; Animals, Dogs; Community Life, School; Humor/Funny, Funny; Series, Henry Huggins

Main Characters

Beezus a young neighborhood girl who is Henry's friend

Henry Huggins the boy who owns Ribsy

Joe Saylor a boy who claims Ribsy is his dog after Ribsy becomes a hero at a football game

Larry Biggerstaff a boy who brings Ribsy into his apartment building

Mr. and Mrs. Dingley, Zibby, Louanne, Sally, Lisa, and George a family who takes Ribsy home

Mr. and Mrs. Huggins Henry's parents

Mr. and Mrs. Saylor and Darlene Joe's parents and sister

Mr. Woody the principal at Mrs. Sonchek's school

Mrs. Frawley an old woman who dresses Ribsy up for her club meeting

Mrs. Kreech a woman in Larry's apartment building

Mrs. Sonchek the teacher who allows her second-grade students to take Ribsy into the classroom as their mascot

Ramona Beezus's sister

Ribsy Henry's dog, who becomes lost at a shopping center

Vocabulary

mascot a person, animal, or object believed to bring good luck, especially one kept as the symbol of an athletic team or organization

pedigree the line of ancestors of a purebred animal

southpaw a left-handed person

spectacles glasses

Synopsis

Ribsy is just an ordinary city dog belonging to Henry Huggins. One day, Ribsy rides with the Huggins family in their new car to a shopping center where he is left inside while the family shops. He accidentally hits the automatic window button, which rolls down the window, allowing him to escape.

Ribsy heads out in search of Henry, but ends up jumping into the Dingleys' station wagon, mistaking its smell for the Hugginses' vehicle. When the Dingleys return to their car and find Ribsy, Mrs. Dingley wants him out, but soon relents and allows him to accompany them home. Ribsy senses they are going in the wrong direction, taking him away from Henry. Meanwhile, Henry discovers Ribsy is missing, and after a search of the parking lot, believes his dog became tired of waiting for him and headed home.

Once home, the Dingley children give Ribsy a bath. He is patient with their attention until George, the baby, empties an entire bottle of violet-scented bubble bath over Ribsy. He escapes the tub and trails bubbles all over the house. Mr. Dingley suggests they take him for a ride in their heated car to dry Ribsy off. When the family returns to their home, Ribsy leaps from the station wagon and heads toward the highway.

Ribsy then follows the smell of coffee to Mrs. Frawley's house. She is a lonely old lady who decides to keep him for company. He allows her to dress him up in a straw hat, a pair of false spectacles, and a corn cob pipe. The day Mrs. Frawley presents Ribsy, whom she has nicknamed

Ribsy by Beverly Cleary

"Rags," to her women's club members, though, he makes a break for freedom.

While Ribsy is making his way from one owner to another, the Hugginses attempt to find him. They call the Humane Society and place an ad in the newspaper, offering a reward for Ribsy. Mr. Dingley sees the ad and calls the Hugginses to tell them he is sure Ribsy is the dog they picked up earlier.

Next, Ribsy finds himself in a schoolyard, where he follows the students into school and takes a place in Mrs. Sonchek's second grade classroom. The teacher does not mind Ribsy in her room, and Mr. Woody, the principal, makes Ribsy the class's mascot. However, that changes the day of Show and Tell. One of the students brings in a squirrel, and Ribsy becomes excited. The squirrel escapes and chaos follows. Mr. Woody says he made a mistake in allowing Ribsy in the classroom. He is taken outside, and the principal tells him to "go home."

Next, the smell of hot dogs lures Ribsy to a football stadium. Ribsy then patiently waits outside until he is able to sneak inside when the gatekeeper is not watching. No one really pays attention to him as he wanders around the stadium. He finds a ramp, which leads him directly onto the football field. With seconds left to play in the game, a boy trying to score a winning touchdown trips over Ribsy, and the ball becomes loose. The opposing team, Zachary Taylor High School, wins the game and Ribsy becomes a hero. Joe Saylor, a young boy watching the game, takes advantage of Ribsy's hero status and claims the dog is his. A photographer who takes a picture of Ribsy's "heroic" moment, also takes down Joe's name and address. Ribsy follows Joe home, but Joe's mother is not very happy to see her son with a dog. However, his parents allow Ribsy to stay.

It is not long before Joe receives a phone call from Henry, who saw Ribsy's picture in the paper and wants his dog back. Joe is reluctant to admit Ribsy might be Henry's dog, until he finds out there is a reward for his return. Henry wants to talk to Ribsy on

the phone, and when the dog hears Henry's voice, Ribsy frantically scratches the door, believing Henry is somewhere on the other side. Joe's sister opens the door, and Ribsy escapes.

After leaving Joe's house, Ribsy wanders aimlessly around the neighborhood and discovers a boy, Larry Biggerstaff, with a tennis ball. Larry takes Ribsy into his apartment building, but is worried when the dog begins to bark. He fears Mrs. Kreech, the manager of the building, will find out he has a dog and evict him and his mother, so he hides Ribsy on the second-floor fire escape. Henry spots Ribsy on the fire escape as his family is driving by in the station wagon. Henry's father helps retrieve Ribsy and offers Larry part of the reward for Ribsy's return. The Hugginses are so happy to have Ribsy back that they allow him to sit on the seat of their new car on the way home.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Ribsy goes from one person to another in the story and even ends up staying with a classroom of children for a time. Which person or people do you think would have made Ribsy the happiest if Henry had not found them? Why?

Responses will vary. Students should indicate one or more of the people Ribsy encountered as the one(s) to make the dog happiest and clearly state why they feel so.

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Joe Saylor does not want to admit to Henry Huggins that he has Ribsy. It is only after he learns there is a reward for Ribsy's return that he considers returning the dog. Why do you think the ten-dollar reward makes him change his mind so quickly?

The Saylor family is not a wealthy family. Joe's mother comments she has enough trouble feeding the family of four and paying for Darlene's piano lessons, without taking on a dog. Students can conclude there is not money for extra things for Joe. As much as he enjoys having Ribsy, he probably is considering all the things he can do with the money because he seldom has the opportunity to have extra money.

Inferential Comprehension

Ribsy makes friends with two different boys during the period he is lost. How are Joe Saylor and Larry Biggerstaff different from Henry?

Henry never gives up hope of finding Ribsy and even refuses to get another dog. Joe, on the other hand, is only loyal to Ribsy until he is offered a ten-dollar reward for his return. Henry seems kinder to Ribsy than Larry does. Henry begs his parents to let Ribsy ride in their new car, but Larry does not hesitate to leave Ribsy stranded on a fire escape.

Constructing Meaning

When the Hugginses discover Ribsy is missing, they call the Humane Society and place an ad in the newspaper. What would you do if you lost a family pet? What steps would you take? Would you offer a reward? If so, how much would you offer?

Students should offer several logical courses of action to find a missing pet. For example, they might first search the neighborhood, go door-to-door asking if anyone has seen the missing animal. Next, they might call the local Humane Society or police station. They could put up posters around the neighborhood or in school notifying the community of the lost pet. Along with this option, placing an ad in the newspaper seems appropriate. It is up to the individual student to determine whether or not a reward should be offered and how much the reward might be.

Teachable Skills

Understanding the Author's Craft Have students choose one part of the story in which Ribsy encounters one of the people who take him in. Have them reread that part, and then ask them to write what happens to Ribsy from his own point of view, using the first-person style of writing. It should be as a diary entry. One example follows: Dear Diary, You wouldn't believe the morning I've had. How unfair! How unjust! I was wrongly accused, and I still can't get over it. It was all that little squirrel's fault. How dare he come into my new home and try to steal my glory....

Making Predictions As it turns out, Ribsy is discovered on the fire escape of Larry Biggerstaff's apartment building. The Huggins family rescues him, and the reader assumes they take him home. Have students predict what might have happened to Ribsy if he had not been found on the fire escape. It is clear Larry is very concerned that Mrs. Kreech will find Ribsy. What might have happened if she had? In small groups, have students write a different ending to the chapter called, "Ribsy and the Apartment House." Once complete, have each group read their ending aloud to the class. Students can

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Ribsy

by

Beverly Cleary

choose which group's new ending they like the best.

Identifying Reasons Mrs. Saylor is not very happy to see her son with Ribsy. She knows having a dog in the house means an additional cost to the family. On the other hand, Mrs. Frawley enjoys having Ribsy at her house, since she is alone and has no one to talk to. Have students create a list of the advantages and disadvantages of owning a pet.

Identifying Reading Strategies In chapter two, Henry's mother comments that Ribsy is "hardly the kind of dog someone would want to steal." He does not have a pedigree. Have students create a dictionary of dog-related terms in which they write their own definitions of the terms chosen. For example, "Afghan" can be used for the letter A, "bite" for the letter B, etc. Each entry can be illustrated. Entries can be assembled in a class booklet.