

Dear Mrs. LaRue Discussion Guide | Scholastic.com

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About the Book

After numerous incidents of bad behavior, Mrs. LaRue sends her dog Ike to obedience school. Ike, however, is highly insulted and sees the school as a prison. His daily letters home complain of imagined indignities and exaggerated tales of mistreatment. Readers are quickly alerted to these humorous discrepancies by the witty illustrations: Ike's dark perceptions are in black and white, while the real world is shown in color. After 10 days of trying to persuade his owner to come and get him, Ike makes "a daring escape" to live a "life of hardship and danger." His letters as a fugitive point out how much Mrs. LaRue really needs a dog. And indeed she does. When Ike returns to his hometown, he is just in time to rescue Mrs. LaRue from an oncoming truck. Ike's heroism is celebrated with a story in the local paper and a party given by Mrs. LaRue.

About the Author

For Mark Teague, a story starts from his "notebooks full of sketches and scribbles, strange little drawings and phrases..." His inspiration for the character of Ike in *Dear Mrs. LaRue* came from two dogs in his life. His own dog, Earl, was a master food thief, and his brother's dog, Ali, actually limped when he wanted attention!

Although Teague never had any formal training as a writer or illustrator, he has already illustrated and/or written more than 20 picture books. In a sense, Teague's career began when he was a child and wrote and illustrated his own stories. After college, he worked in a bookstore where his interest in children's stories was rekindled. His titles include *How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight?*, *The Great Gracie Chase*, *Pigsty*, the Poppleton books, and the First Graders from Mars books. Teague currently lives with his wife and two daughters in Coxsackie, New York.

Using the Reproducibles

After reading and enjoying the story with students, you'll want to explore some of the many teachable elements in it. Use the following reproducibles to help enrich and enhance students' appreciation of the book.

Reproducible 1: Whose Views

This page helps students understand the format and humor of the book as well as the different points of view in the story. The activity also promotes visual literacy by drawing attention to the illustrations and how they work with the text. Before assigning the page, you might encourage students to discuss occasions when they have viewed things differently than someone else.

Reproducible 2: Ike's Report Card

This page invites students to think about Ike's behavior and character. After students have completed the page, have them share and compare their ratings. Point out that like many characters, Ike has his ups and downs.

Reproducible 3: Real and Fanciful

Many children have difficulty separating the real and imaginary; this page gives them an opportunity to see

how the author blends his imaginary story with the behavior of real dogs. You might want to suggest that students add other examples to each list.

Reproducible 4: Dear Mrs. La Rue

On this page students can respond to the story by writing a letter to Mrs. LaRue giving her advice for handling Ike in the future. Students might mention whether or not they think Ike has learned anything from his experience, what kinds of trouble he might cause in the future, and how Mrs. LaRue might deal with him.

More Ideas!

Use some or all of these suggestions to involve students in the story.

Role Play

To help students understand different points of view from the story, invite them to take turns role playing these scenarios. Suggest that students use the book as a guide, but add their own dialogue and interpretations.

- A confrontation between Mrs. LaRue and Ike when she decides to send him to the Igor Brotweiler Canine Academy.
- The moment when Mrs. LaRue discovers that Ike has eaten the chicken pie she was saving for dinner.
- The incident when Ike chases Mrs. Hibbins' two cats onto the fire escape in the middle of winter.
- An obedience class at the school in which Miss Klondike gets exasperated with Ike who refuses to cooperate.
- Ike's visit to the vet, Dr. Wilfrey.
- Ike's heroic rescue of Mrs. LaRue from the truck.
- An interview that Ike gives to reporters about his experiences.

Story Calendar

Point out that Ike's letters to Mrs. LaRue are dated, and the story extends from the newspaper article on September 30 to the article on October 13. Have students make calendars showing these dates. Then have them write in the corresponding story event for each date.

Character Map

Create three big circles on the blackboard. Ike is in the middle circle (you can either write his name or draw his picture.) The words "Positive Characteristics" and "Negative Characteristics" are in separate circles on opposite sides attached by lines to center circle. From each of these secondary circles, show six or seven smaller empty circles that are big enough for kids to write a word in.

Ike

Write these words on the chalkboard and ask students how they would describe Ike: *determined, naughty, helpful, clever, self-centered*. Have students decide where to put the words on the web. Continue by asking

students to add words of their own to describe Ike. Have students refer to the story to show how their word applies to Ike. For example, if students say that Ike is inconsiderate, they should identify a part of the story to support this behavior. (Note: You may wish to relate this activity to Ike's Report Card on Reproducible 2.)

Writing

Have students respond to the book with one of these writing assignments.

- Students might pretend they are Miss Klondike at the obedience school and write a letter to Mrs. LaRue discussing Ike's behavior.
- Draw attention to the newspaper articles in the story. Then have students write a newspaper article about another Ike episode such as the cats on the fire escape or one that they make up. Encourage students to follow the form of a news article and include a headline, date, and lead paragraph.

Art

Visually oriented students might try one of these activities.

- Remind students that Mrs. LaRue sends a get well card when Ike is ill. Have students design humorous get well cards that they might send to Ike.
- Discuss Mark Teague's use of black and white to show Ike's viewpoint and color to show what is really going on. Then invite students to illustrate Ike's next adventure in a similar way.

- Subjects:

Literature, Plot, Character, Setting, Reading Response, Creative Writing, Letter Writing, Arts and Creativity, Communities and Ways of Life, Friends and Friendship

- Skills:

Plot, Character and Setting, Point of View, Writing