

PATRICK JENNINGS CURRICULUM GUIDE



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PATRICK JENNINGS was born in Indiana and grew up surrounded by kids. With six siblings and many childhood friends, he was never at a loss for companionship. In middle school, he often babysat his nieces and nephews, and he loved making up games and stories to entertain them.

From an early age, Jennings wanted to be a teacher, partially because he loved his own teachers so much, but also because he loved books and enjoyed working with children. After studying

art education in college, Jennings attended graduate school, where he learned that preschool curriculum is mostly art-based and found his niche: preschool teaching in San Francisco, Mexico, and Arizona over an eight-year period. It was during this time that he rediscovered his love for children's books and realized that he could connect two of his great loves—teaching kids and stories—through writing.

Jennings wrote his first novel while teaching in the morning and working at the local library in the afternoon. He revised it on the library's public computers, after hours, and even cataloged the book when it came out, shelved it, and checked it out to patrons. After signing a contract for his fourth book, he resigned from the preschool and the library and began writing full-time.

In describing his writing process, Jennings points out that he likes to complete a rough draft quickly, so that he doesn't lose track of tone or rhythm. "Generally," he says, "I like to finish a rough draft between four and six weeks, so I choose a month when I have fewer engagements. Then comes the revision process, which I happen to love. I enjoy watching a story go from awkward to steady, from coarse to fine."



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In giving writing advice to young people, Jennings says, “The most important thing to do is *read*.” Jennings regularly hosts writing groups for young authors; one requirement is that all attendees read voraciously. “Their writing reflects it,” he says. “Writers first emulate other authors. Reading is akin to a painter studying the masters. Writing is trying to paint in the style of the masters. I’ve found most kids have a built-in desire to tell stories. Every kid who attends group regularly loves to write. Some write voluminously; a few have completed novels. They face mechanical challenges—spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure, etc., but if they keep their eyes on the story in front of them, those challenges become necessary tools they don’t resist learning. So I suggest writers read and write; I say don’t be afraid to make mistakes, don’t avoid learning new things, remain curious, and have fun—that’s my advice.”

There have been many highlights in Jennings’s career, and he names just a few: visiting thousands of young readers and writers all across the country; publishing his stories; and working with incredibly talented, dedicated, and friendly people. “There have been so many highs,” he says, “that the lows barely register.”

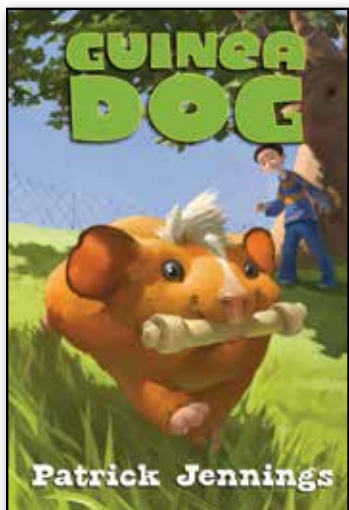
Jennings currently lives with his family in Port Townsend, on the beautiful Olympic Peninsula in Washington State. There he works and leads a workshop for young writers. A fan of school visits, he loves working with student bodies of all sizes and says that his favorite part of a school visit is the Q & A. His main goal, he says, “is to inspire kids to view writing as the exciting experience I believe it to be.” Jennings misses teaching and working in the library, but participating in school author visits gives him time to interact with young people and books and book lovers in a variety of settings. Jennings says, “I feel as if I am ‘talking’ to them as I write my stories. So it’s all worked out beautifully.”

..... ABOUT THE BOOKS

Jennings’s stories are similar to several of his childhood favorites—novels by Beverly Cleary, Roald Dahl, and E.B. White. Like these classics, Jennings describes his novels as “funny stories about real kids with families and friends and teachers and pets. Some of those stories had fantasy elements—a spider who could write, a giant peach, a mouse who rode a motorcycle—but the stories always occurred in the real world. This is an apt description of many of my stories.” His novels are characterized by offbeat humor. His Guinea Dog series, for example, features a guinea pig who behaves like a dog; *Hissy Fitz* is told from the point of view of a frustrated cat who simply wants some calm in his chaotic world, and *Petopia: The Fur Flies* features a rabbit who acts like a parrot. Below are discussion questions and classroom activities related to his novels.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Guinea Dog

ISBN: 9781606840535 HC
9781606841532 PB

CHARACTERIZE

Rufus's parents. How are they alike? How are they different? Why does his father not want Rufus to have a dog? Why does his mother bring home a guinea pig? What reaction do Rufus and his father have to it?

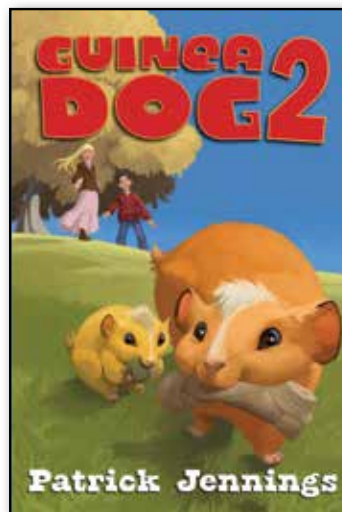
Rufus's father has his own worries. What work-related struggle does he have, and how does he resolve it by the end of the story? How does his struggle influence the family?

Describe Rufus and Murphy's friendship. Why is Rufus jealous of Murphy? Should he be? Why or why not? How are Rufus and Murphy alike? How are they different? Is Murphy a good friend? Support your answers with evidence from the story.

Why does Rufus's mother encourage a friendship between Rufus and Lurena? What reaction does Rufus have to his mother's interest in Lurena and why?

Describe Rufus's first reactions to the guinea pig his mother brings home. Why does Rufus name him Fido? How does Rufus's attitude toward Fido change over time and why? How does Fido get Rufus in trouble? What special talents does Fido have that make him unique? What do Rufus's friends think of Fido and why?

Who is Dmitri? Identify several places in the story where Dmitri teases Rufus. Why does Dmitri tease Rufus, and how does Rufus respond to him? Does Dmitri want Rufus to feel bad? Why or why not? How does Murphy treat Dmitri? Is Dmitri a likable person? Support your response with evidence from the story.



Guinea Dog 2

ISBN: 9781606844526 HC
9781606845479 PB

RUFUS'S FRIENDS

at school learn Rufus's guinea pig behaves like a dog. How do they respond to this news? How does Rufus feel about the attention?

Rufus doesn't like all the attention from his friends. Therefore, he takes

steps to turn Guinea Dog into a regular guinea pig. Describe Rufus's efforts to reform Guinea Dog. How does Rufus feel about Guinea Dog's weight gain?

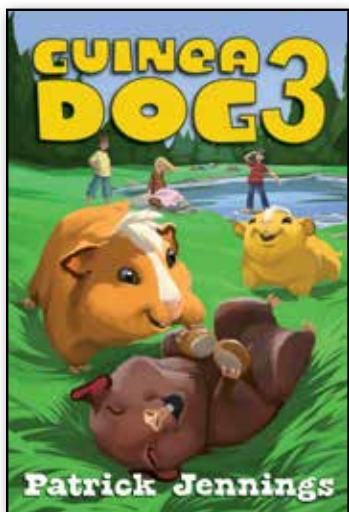
What happens to Guinea Dog that frightens Rufus? How does Rufus find Guinea Dog and why did Guinea Dog disappear?

Describe how Rufus's parents respond to Guinea Dog's disappearance and the new guinea pig. Should Rufus have kept the second guinea pig? Why or why not?

What surprise is in store for Rufus and his family? How does Lurena end up with a

guinea pig? Describe her new pet's unique characteristics.

While Guinea Dog's disappearance is a serious matter, the author maintains a humorous tone in telling the story. Identify words and phrases that contribute to the offbeat humor in the story.



Guinea Dog 3

ISBN: 9781606845547 HC

RUFUS AND HIS family go on an annual camping trip. Rufus looks forward to the trip with his best friend; however, what surprise does his mother share with him? How does Rufus feel about the additional companionship?

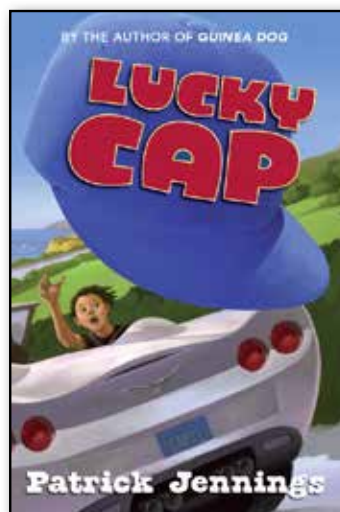
Rufus, his best friend Murphy, and his worst friend, Dmitri meet Pablo at the camping site. Compare and contrast Dmitri and Pablo. Why does Pablo not join them swimming?

How does Rufus learn of the pet store Petopia? Why does he want to go to the pet store, and why does he keep it a secret from everyone except his mother and his new friend Pablo?

What dilemma does Rufus face when his mother purchases a second guinea pig? How does he resolve his problem? How does Murphy respond to Rufus's decision to give Pablo the guinea pig, and what does Murphy's response indicate about his

character? What is the meaning of the word *petopia*? In what way is this a fitting name for the pet store?

Describe the guinea pig that Rufus and his mother buy at the store. What unique abilities does it have?



Lucky Cap

ISBN: 9781606840542 HC
9781606843062 PB

DESCRIBE ENZO'S family. What new job does his father acquire and how does it affect the family? Describe Enzo and his father's summer trip. How does Enzo change over the summer, and what changes have occurred at home during his absence? How are

he and his father received by the rest of the family upon returning? Is his father worried about the changes? Why or why not?

When Enzo begins his first year of middle school, why does his older sister, Lupe, who attends the same school, keep her distance from Enzo? Does she do so for good reason? Explain your answer. How is Nadine different from Enzo's other sisters? Why does Enzo go to her room to talk? Does she give him good advice? Explain.

Enzo and Kai have been best friends forever. However, when both begin middle school, Enzo distances himself from Kai. Why does Enzo refuse to recognize his friendship with Kai? Is he right to do so? What does

Enzo's behavior indicate about his character?
Does Kai understand Enzo's behavior?

Who are Chase and Lance, and how does Enzo meet them? Why does Enzo want to be accepted by the "athletic boys" at school? Chase is a newfound friend; however, Lance (Chase's friend) does not readily accept Enzo. Why? Analisa is another new friend. How is she different from the other girls Enzo meets at his new school? Does she prove to be a true friend? Explain.

Who is Ink, and what happens to him while Enzo is vacationing with his dad? How does Enzo feel about the change? Ink is not a major character in the story; however, he does play an important role. How so? (What does he tell us about Rufus's home life? How does the writer use him to create humor?)

Enzo begins middle school knowing that it will have its challenges. First and foremost, he believes he must belong to the "in" crowd. How does he set out to establish his identity? What contributes to his unexpected popularity? What happens when he loses his cap? Did his cap make him popular? Support your answer with evidence from the story.



Dognap

ISBN: 9781606844434 PB

DESCRIBE LOGAN'S relationship with his mother. Is she a patient parent? Explain. How would she characterize her son? Does she take his investigation seriously? Is Logan a popular kid? What makes him admirable? How would he respond to being pushed around by a school bully?

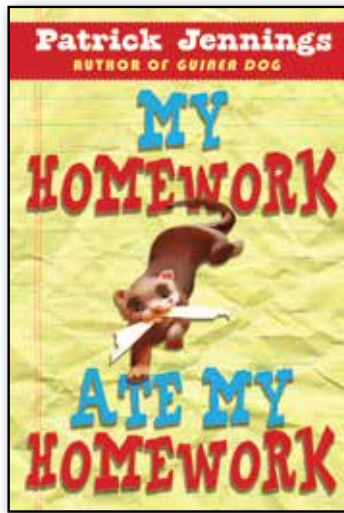
Identify Logan's closest friends. Who takes his story about dogs disappearing the most seriously? Why are his friends skeptical? How do Logan's friends organize as a team to find the dognapper? What do they call their organization? How do his friends help him in the end?

Who is Darius, and why is his father upset with Logan? Is his father's anger justified? Explain.

A number of dogs appear in *Dognap*. Logan owns Bubba, an aging bloodhound. Kian's family owns, Chloe, a pint-size Yorkie; Aggy has Festus; and Thatcher has Bear. Several additional characters have pets as well. Each pet is well loved by its owner. Identify one dog that goes missing and explain its owner's reaction when the animal disappears and returns.

Review the dogs in the story. Could any one dog be left out of the story without changing the plot? Why or why not? Describe an additional scene that could be added to the story that would include one of the dogs.

When Logan first explains seeing a dog disappear, what reaction does he get from his friends at school? How do Logan and his friends solve the mystery of the missing dogs? How do they get the dogs back to their original owners?



My Homework Ate My Homework

ISBN: 9781606842867 HC
9781606845066 PB

parent is more likely to “draw the line” in terms of completing school assignments? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Zaritza dreams of playing the lead role in a school play; however, her teacher, Mr. O, refuses to allow her to participate unless she improves in math. Describe her first impressions of Eden, her math tutor. How does Zaritza’s relationship with Eden change throughout the course of the novel and why? Is Zaritza a good friend? Explain.

Who is Bandito, and why is Zaritza in charge of caring for him? Describe Zaritza’s reaction to Bandito when she is first assigned to care for him. What happens that changes Zaritza’s attitude toward Bandito?

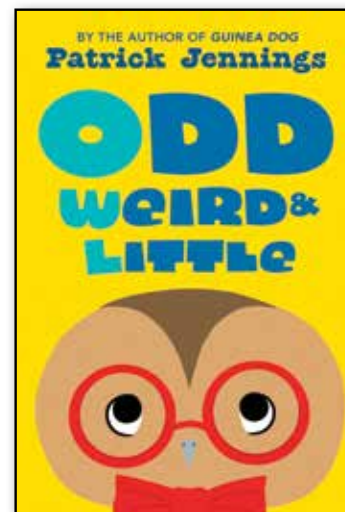
DESCRIBE

Zaritza’s relationship with her father. What common interest and creative gene do they share? How does her mother view Zaritza’s talent?

How do Zaritza’s parents respond to her poor performance in math? Which

Zaritza expects to earn the lead in the school play; however, she is stunned when she is given a minor role. Why does she not get the lead? How does this turn of events affect her popularity and her behavior? How does it affect the perceptions others have of her?

Eden is given the leading part in the school play. How does this leading role affect Eden and the perceptions her classmates have of her? Does Eden change as the story progresses? If so, how?



Odd, Weird and Little
ISBN: 9781606843741 HC
9781606845684 PB

TOULOUSE IS a new kid in school, and he and Woodrow quickly become friends. How are they alike? How are they different?

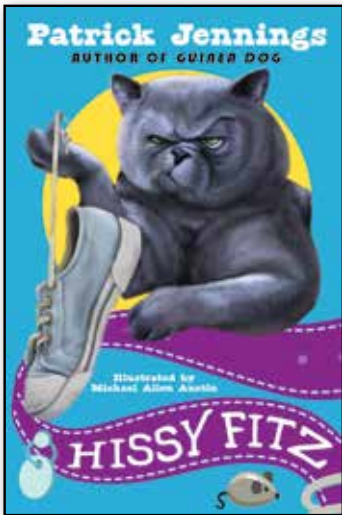
Describe Toulouse. What makes him different from the other students? Discuss his response to bullying. Is his

response a good one? Why or why not?

Bullying is a theme in the story. Describe how the author develops this theme. What events does the author use to develop the theme, and how does the theme play out in the end?

When Toulouse leaves the class because he is ill, what does Woodrow do to deflect attention from Toulouse? Why is Woodrow concerned? What does Woodrow’s behavior say about friendship and loyalty?

Toulouse has an unusual response to cats. By the end of the story, readers know that Toulouse is not human. What is he? Identify clues from the story that support your answer.



Hissy Fitz
ISBN: 9781606845967

DISCUSS THE point of view from which the author tells this story. How would this story be different if it were written from Georgia's point of view? Zeb's?

What do readers learn about Hissy that they might not learn if the story were told from a

human point of view?

Why does Hissy go out at night? Who does he meet? Discuss how his life is different from theirs. What importance can you attribute to the cat soccer game?

Why does Hissy return to the dumpster? What does this act say about Hissy's character? Why do you think the author included this scene?

Why is Hissy so frustrated with the family? Think about an animal that you may have in your home or one that belongs to someone you know. Discuss how that animal might view his or her surroundings.

Compare and contrast the ways in which the twins, Abe and Zeb, interact with Hissy. What can readers learn about how to treat a pet from this story?



Petopia: The Fur Flies
ISBN: 9781606845561

WHERE DOES Iowa get the idea to have a parrot as a pet? Why don't her father and grandmother get her one?

Iowa is an only child, but she has two close friends: Vindy and Reilly. Compare and contrast her two friends. Are they

good friends? Why or why not?

How does Iowa respond to Echo? Why does her grandmother choose a rabbit for a pet? How do Iowa's friends, Vindy and Reilly, respond to Echo?

Iowa is surprised to learn that Echo has characteristics of a parrot. Explain Echo's talents.

Why does Iowa's other grandmother want her son and granddaughter to move to the country and live with her? How do Iowa and her father respond to this idea?

Iowa believes her father is taking evening classes to become an accountant. What secret is he keeping from her? How does she learn his secret, and what reaction does Iowa have to it?

COMMON CORE EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

(Activities can be applied to any Jennings novel)

Using a computer, summarize a memorable scene or chapter from a Jennings novel. Share your rough draft in a peer conference and revise and edit the piece as needed.

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.5 & ELA-Literacy.W.5.5)

Write a paragraph in which you describe a key character from a favorite Jennings novel. Use at least two transition phrases (e.g., *for instance, also, in addition*) to introduce examples that support your paragraph's theme. Make sure you include a concluding statement.

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.1 & ELA-Literacy.W.5.1)

Identify two favorite characters from one story (or from two separate stories) and write a dialogue between them. The dialogue should be in some way illustrative of that person's character. For example, Rufus's dad (from *Guinea Dog*) does not like dogs in the house; Zaritza (*My Homework Ate My Homework*) doesn't like ferrets. A dialogue between the two might show their attitudes toward these animals.

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3 & ELA-Literacy.W.5.3)

Identify an animal you would be interested in having as a new pet. Using at least two sources, one from the Internet and another from print, write a one-page summary explaining how to care for this new pet. For example, what type of environment will it need to live well, what food does it need, and what steps will you need to take to ensure its well-being?

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.6; Literacy.W.4.7; & ELA-Literacy.W.5.6; Literacy.W.5.7)

Develop and perform a skit using at least two characters from different books. You may choose to dress up like the character and/or create props to use in your performance.

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.6; ELA-Literacy.SL.5.6; ELA-Literacy.W.4.3; ELA-Literacy.W.5.3)

Write a journal from the viewpoint of any animal in one of the stories. For example, you might take the point of view of Hissy, Guinea Dog, guinea squirrel, or Echo.

(CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3; ELA-Literacy.W.5.3)

Curriculum Guide written by Pam B. Cole





**AWARDS AND HONORS FOR
PATRICK JENNINGS'S *GUINEA DOG***

- WINNER OF THE 2013 KANSAS WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD
- WINNER OF THE 2011 WASHINGTON STATE SCANDIUZZI CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD
- A 2013 HONOR BOOK FOR THE MASSACHUSETTS CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD
- A 2014–2015 MINNESOTA MAUD HART LOVELACE BOOK AWARD NOMINEE
- A 2014–2015 INDIANA YOUNG HOOSIER BOOK AWARD NOMINEE
- A 2014 HAWAII NĒNĒ AWARD NOMINEE
- A 2014 WASHINGTON STATE SASQUATCH AWARD NOMINEE
- A 2012–2013 FLORIDA SUNSHINE STATE YOUNG READER'S AWARD NOMINEE
- A 2011–2012 COLORADO CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD NOMINEE
- A 2010–2011 NEW HAMPSHIRE GREAT STONE FACE BOOK AWARD NOMINEE



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