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Activity Guide

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The Dog Who Had Kittens

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ABOUT THE STORY

When Eloise the Cat has kittens, Baxter the Basset Hound feels neglected and is not allowed in the house. Upset at this upheaval in his life, he blames Eloise. His grumpiness disappears one day when he finds his way into the laundry room and sees the kittens for the first time. He instead becomes angry with Eloise for seemingly shirking her motherly duties by being away from the kittens between feedings. Baxter decides to fill the void and is delighted when the kittens snuggle and play with him. He becomes very protective of the kittens, until one day he finds that the kittens have all gone to new homes of their own. Grief stricken, Baxter befriends Eloise, and the two come to appreciate their mutual friendship.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Denver, Colorado, Polly M. Robertus attended the University of California at San Diego where she received her B.A. degree with honors in 1970. She went on to further her education at the University of Texas at Austin in 1991. She came up with the idea for *The Dog Who Had Kittens* from a real dog belonging to a friend of one of her children.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

A native Texan, Janet Stevens received her B.F.A. from the University of Colorado in 1975. She has illustrated many popular children's books, including *Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock*, *Anansi Goes Fishing* and *Anansi and the Talking Melon.*, which are also available as Live Oak Media Readalongs. She has earned numerous awards and honors, and her work on *Tops and Bottoms* earned her a Caldecott Honor Book Award.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Introduce the story as one about the relationship between a dog to newborn kittens and their mother. Explain that this is a story in which a dog assumes what he thinks are the responsibilities of the mother when she isn't doing the job as well as he thinks she should be.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- Why was Baxter angry with Eloise? (*he thought she was being a bad mom*)
- Did Eloise deserve to have Baxter angry with her? (*no*)
- How did the relationship between Baxter and Eloise change after the kittens left? (*they became friends*)
- How many kittens were there? (*seven*)
- What breed of dog is Baxter? (*Basset Hound*)

Vocabulary

Be sure students have an understanding of the following terms. Depending on age, simply discuss the terms, or have children look them up in a dictionary.

bristled, miserably, furious, muzzles, suckling, squirming, stalked, desperately, massaged, abandoned, mewling, delicately, mites, dangling

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Language Arts/Oral Interpretation: *Finally Friends?*

Ask for general reactions to the story. Discuss the relationship between Baxter and Eloise. Talk about how their relationship changed as Baxter became closer to the kittens, how Baxter interpreted Eloise's behavior as a mother, and how Baxter and Eloise reacted to each other after the kittens had left.

Life and Career Skills: *Be a Responsible Pet Owner*

Explain that Baxter, Eloise, and the kittens were lucky to live with a caring, responsible family. Point out that there are more puppies and kittens in the world than there are families to give them all homes. Explain that most towns try to deal with this problem by creating an animal shelter sponsored by a humane society. If possible, invite a spokesperson from your local animal organization to talk to the group about its work in dealing with homeless animals. Arrange for the group to visit a local animal shelter. Talk about how the animals that don't have loving homes feel, and discuss the importance of spaying and neutering.

Language Arts: *Name That Pet!*

Have the pet owners in the group write the name(s) of their pet(s) on the board. Invite those who don't have a pet to think of a name they might give to a pet if they had one and write it on the board as well. After the names are all written, ask the group to guess what kind of animal each pet is. Have the owner identify the animal and tell something about their pet and his or her responsibilities in caring for it. Those who don't have a pet could tell why they chose the animal they did.

Creative Writing: *Be a Dog or Cat For a Day!*

Have each of the children pretend to be either a dog or a cat. Have them write a diary entry from the perspective of the animal. Share with the rest of the group and combine to form a class book.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to make sure the sites are suitable.

Cat and Dog Breeds

Divide the children into small groups. Assign each group a specific dog or cat breed to research. Enter the name of the breed into an Internet search engine and search for information (country or place of origin, temperament, physical characteristics, diet, other interesting facts, etc.). Have each group design and create a poster about their animal and give a presentation to the rest of the class. Sample cat breeds include Siamese, Persian, Maine Coon, Manx, Burmese, and Domestic. Dog breeds could include St. Bernard, Dachshund, Poodle, Spaniel, Boxer, and Chihuahua. Be sure to print out pictures of the breed!