



## ***Forward, Shakespeare!***

Jean Little

Interest level: ages 8–11

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112 pages

AR Quiz # 102839

**Consider the following question as you read *Forward, Shakespeare!*:**

How can a dog help you transform anger into joy?

### **Story**

In *Rescue Pup*, Jean Little's first book about Shakespeare, the Seeing Eye pup conquered many fears. Now he is back, about to be matched up with a blind boy, ready to begin his working life. Tim is enraged by his blindness and wants nothing to do with a guide dog. But he is no match for Shakespeare.

### **Author**

**Jean Little** is one of Canada's most beloved writers for children. She is also blind and currently living with her fourth Seeing Eye dog. She has traveled to the Seeing Eye headquarters in New Jersey four times to train with a dog: first Zephyr, then Ritz, then Pippa and now Honey. For years she thought about writing a book about the training of a Seeing Eye dog. Now she has done it, but Shakespeare is not just any dog. Jean is also the author of *Birdie for Now*, *I Gave My Mom a Castle*, *The Birthday Girl* and *Rescue Pup*. She lives in Guelph, Ontario.

## Connecting to the Curriculum

### *Language Arts*

- In chapter 20 of her book *Make it Real: Strategies for Success with Informational Texts*, Linda Hoyt discusses the process of Investigations. Using this as a guideline or template, have students research the process of training Seeing Eye dogs.
- The dogs in *Forward, Shakespeare!* are able to speak “Human.” Have students create a cartoon strip that illustrates a situation from the book. Or have students create original cartoon strips using the dog characters from *Forward, Shakespeare!* but placing them in unique situations.
- Visualization is a powerful way to gain comprehension of a story. In her book *Strategies That Work*, Stephanie Harvey devotes a chapter to visualizing activities. One of these is “Visualizing from a Vivid Piece of Text.” Select a passage from *Forward, Shakespeare!* that you find particularly powerful and vivid. For example: when Tim rejects Shakespeare, at the beginning of chapter 5, or at the beginning of chapter 7, when Shakespeare ponders his new life ahead. Share this with your students. Can they find a passage that speaks powerfully to them?
- Tim is on a “journey into freedom.” Discuss the meaning of this phrase with students. Have them imagine that they are Tim, and write a letter to a friend explaining how this journey has changed their life.
- Teach introduces Shakespeare to Tim as a “vanilla dog with caramel ears.” Ask students: why does he do this? Can students brainstorm ways to describe things in the classroom using different senses?
- Tessa is the girl Shakespeare spends the first year of his life with in *Rescue Pup*. Have students write a letter from Tessa to Tim, introducing Shakespeare to him.
- Shakespeare experiences a great deal in his short life. Invite students to write several journal entries as Shakespeare, listing some of his most special recollections.

### *Social Studies*

- Guide dogs are great, but we can also find our way by using a map. Tim and Sam travel several routes with their guide dogs. Have students draw a map of one of the routes they use, labeling the parts that are named in the story. Then have students draw a map of the route they take to school from their home. On this map they must include such things as a compass rose showing direction and the names of streets and buildings or stores they pass.

**Science**

- After students have read about both famous and ordinary people living with disabilities, have them invent something that would improve the quality of life for one of these people. For example: a wheelchair that allows the user to play basketball, a prosthesis that is geared to a specialized activity, or a special headset for someone who is hard of hearing.
- Shakespeare and Larkin are twins and their owners mix them up. There are different types of twins: identical or fraternal. Have students find out about twins and the interesting characteristics they share.
- Global Positioning Systems (GPS) can provide the visually impaired with the ability to navigate around their city or town. Have students explore how GPS works and how it can enhance our ability to find our way.

**Health/Personal Planning**

- Shakespeare is a unique dog. He understands what is expected of him, and he perseveres to get it done. For example, he tries again and again to respond to Teach's commands perfectly—until he gets it right. Have students find other examples in the text where Shakespeare shows this perseverance. Lead students in a discussion of what kind of dog this makes him. How can perseverance help them in their own worlds? How can it help them reach their own goals?
- What evidence does Shakespeare have that Tim's mother isn't a good mother for his particular needs at this time? How does Mrs. Browning limit Tim by the way she behaves?

**Art**

- At one point in the story, Tim mutters, "I wish I could see their faces." Select one character from *Forward, Shakespeare!* and have your class draw them to provide an image for this situation. Or designate groups of students different characters so that all characters from the book will be represented.
- Shakespeare and Larkin are twins. Some twins are identical and some exhibit slight differences in appearance. Have all students draw two dogs, but have some draw identical dogs and others draw dogs with slight differences. Display the pictures and see if students can distinguish between the groups.

**Drama**

- Shakespeare tries hard to get Tim to like him. Have groups of students act out possible ways that Shakespeare might win Tim over.
- Teach helps Shakespeare and the other guide dogs learn their craft. Divide students into groups and have them work together on a task or skill they will teach to the rest of the class. For example: learning to play a game, bake a cake or tie knots.
- Provide students with an opportunity to experience a walk without their ability to see. Pair off students and have them take on the roles of either guide (the person who can see) or guided (the person who cannot). Once this has been established, create a safe situation in which the sighted student must guide the unsighted students, then have them reverse roles. Ask them to discuss their experiences.

**Connecting to the Text**

- Guide students in completing a character sketch of Tim. Have them select eight to ten adjectives that describe his personality. Then answer the following questions:
  1. Which qualities do you think help Tim most during the story?
  2. What are some qualities that limit Tim's success in life?
  3. Which of the qualities listed above describes you? Why? Are there some you wish you could change?
- Like plot, setting and characters, *theme* is also an important literary element in any novel. Theme is an idea or message about life revealed in a work of literature. It's not really a moral, but it's kind of a guiding message all the same. Break your class into small groups and have them discuss what they understand to be the theme of *Forward, Shakespeare!*
- Conflict is what keeps a story moving along. It's what makes things interesting! Typically, a story's plot follows one of these four basic patterns of conflict:
  - ◆ *Person against nature.* Tension comes from the character's battle against strong forces of nature.
  - ◆ *Person against person.* Tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.
  - ◆ *Person against society.* Tension comes from the main character's struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
  - ◆ *Person against self.* Tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.

Guide students in a discussion of the kind of conflict patterns in *Forward, Shakespeare!* Are there more than one, depending on which characters you're considering?

### Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. During their Seeing Eye training, Shakespeare and the other dogs must do their very best to please Teach and the other humans—even when they have no idea why. Shakespeare tells them to keep going anyway: Teach has good reasons for his actions. Have you ever had a similar experience where you had to “go on faith” and do something you didn’t understand, before finally learning the real reason? Explain.
2. Shakespeare’s life involves switching masters, sometimes with little notice. How would this be difficult? Do you think it’s harder for a dog than for a person to do?
3. What are some of the most difficult aspects of being a Seeing Eye dog?
4. In *Forward, Shakespeare!* Shakespeare and Tim both have to learn to trust each other. What does trust mean to you? Have you ever had to put your trust in someone or something without knowing if it would be returned? Why is it so difficult for us to trust others?
5. What does Tim mean when he says being blind is a drag?
6. Shakespeare’s fear of water limits his enjoyment of life—until he is suddenly forced to get over it. Do you have any fears that limit you? What if you could just toss off your fears, or magically get over them somehow? How would your life improve as a result?
7. Toward the end of the book, Tim begins to joke a bit about his disability. How is this a positive change? Write about a time in your life when a sense of humor made things easier.

### Author’s Note

Dear Readers,

I have had four exceptional dogs. The first was called Zephyr; he was in many ways the inspiration for Shakespeare. When we met in Morristown at the Seeing Eye, Zephyr knew fourteen commands. Like Shakespeare, he was not at all sure he wanted to belong to me. He had been raised by a family he loved, and then he had been taught his guiding skills by a woman he adored. When he was brought to my room, he went to the door and whined to be let out so that he could go and find her.

But I loved him so much that he finally gave in and came back to Canada with me.

Before he retired when he was ten, he knew thirty-two commands, including such things as “Fetch my shoes.” He would bring me one and wait until I said, “And the other one.” He was a dog with a great sense of humor. I wrote about him in my autobiographical book, *Stars Come Out Within*, and his picture is on the cover.

When I returned to the Seeing Eye for my second dog guide, I was given a big black Lab who was named Ritz. He was anxious at first and always took his work seriously. I had two tiny Papillons by then, and my sister and her Scottie dog, her granddaughter and later her grandson moved with me into an old farmhouse where Ritz had to use

his country training because there were no sidewalks. He managed to get along in that busy house filled with dogs, cats and two young children.

Ritz retired when he was ten and became a family pet, and I returned to the Seeing Eye and came home with my third dog guide, a small yellow Lab named Pippa. She was named Hula when I got her, and she was raised by a girl named Autumn, to whom Rescue Pup is dedicated. Pippa was not as serious as Ritz and not as funny as Zephyr, but she was a darling and I miss having her as my guide. She retired a few years ago. My latest Seeing Eye dog is named Honey. She is an excellent guide, but sneaks food every chance she gets, even right off the counter! I tend to keep her close by.

All these dogs are wonderful. Each one is different, but all are loving and so proud to be dog guides. I truly believe that my four Seeing Eye dogs have all understood both Dog and Human, the way Shakespeare does.

Jean Little

## Resources

### Books

#### Fiction

- Adler, David A. *A Picture Book of Louis Braille*  
 Bauer, Marion Dane. *Run*  
 Beuhner, Carolyn. *Superdog: The Heart of a Hero*  
 Bogart, Jo Ellen. *The Big Tree Gang* (twins)  
 Bunting, Eve. *The Summer Of Riley*  
 DiCamillo, Kate. *Because of Wynn Dixie*  
 Edwards, Julie Andrews. *Dragon, Hound of Honour*  
 Harlow, Joan Hiatt. *Star in the Storm*  
 Harvey, Sarah N. *Puppies on Board*  
 Lang, Glenna. *Looking Out for Sarah*  
 Little, Jean. *Birdie For Now; Different Dragons; I Gave My Mom A Castle; The Stars Come Out Within; Willow and Twig; Rescue Pup*  
 Luthardt, Kevin. *Larabee*  
 Pearce, Jacqueline. *Dog House Blues*  
 Read, Nicholas. *One In A Million*  
 Rossiter, Nan Parson. *Rosie and Rugby*  
 Rylant, Cynthia. *Dog Heaven*  
 Thomas, Jane Resh. *The Comeback Dog*  
 Turner, Pamela S. *Hachiko: The True Story of a Loyal Dog*



*Nonfiction*

- Darling, Kathy. *ABC Dogs* (636.7)  
Garrett, Leslie. *Helen Keller* (362.4)  
Greer, Colin and Herbert Kohl. *A Call to Character* (808.8)  
Harvey, Stephanie and Anne Goudvis. *Strategies That Work* (372.47)  
Hausman, Gerald. *Dogs of Myth: Tales From Around The World* (398.2)  
Kindersley, Barnabas and Anabel Kindersley. *Children Just Like Me* (305.2)  
Landau, Elaine. *Blindness* (617.7)  
Lawrenson, Diana. *Guide Dogs: From Puppies to Partners* (636.7)  
Lundel, Margot. *A Girl Named Helen Keller* (921)  
McGinty, Alice B. *Guide Dogs: Seeing for People Who Can't* (636.7)  
Moore, Eva. *Buddy, The First Seeing Eye Dog* (636.7)  
O'Neill, Linda. *Imagine Being Blind* (362.4)  
Schneck, Marcus. *Dogs: A Portrait of the Animal World* (636.7)  
Shore, Hennie M. *Anybody Can Bake a Cake* (372)  
Steede-Terry, Karen. *Integrating GIS and the Global Positioning System*  
Westcott, Patsy. *Living with Blindness* (362.4)  
White, Peter. *Being Blind* (362.4)

*Online*

Strategies for Teaching Students With Visual Impairments  
[www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/vision.html#sect0](http://www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/vision.html#sect0)

American Foundation For The Blind Braille Bug Site  
[www.afb.org/braillebug](http://www.afb.org/braillebug)

ABC Teach—Graphing Activities  
[www.abcteach.com](http://www.abcteach.com)

Character Counts  
[www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)

Guide Dogs for the Blind: At a Glance: an educational resource guide  
[www.guidedogs.com](http://www.guidedogs.com)

Birthplace of Helen Heller  
[www.helenkellerbirthplace.org](http://www.helenkellerbirthplace.org)

Unicef  
[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

The Seeing Eye  
[www.seeingeye.org](http://www.seeingeye.org)

Guide Dogs

[www.canadaguidetodogs.com/dogjobs/wrk\\_guide.htm](http://www.canadaguidetodogs.com/dogjobs/wrk_guide.htm)

Braille Without Borders

[www.braillewithoutborders.org](http://www.braillewithoutborders.org)

Tips For Teachers—Provides a useful list of tips for assisting students who have a visual impairment cope better in the classroom.

[www.svrc.vic.edu.au/tipsforteachers.html](http://www.svrc.vic.edu.au/tipsforteachers.html)

How GPS Receivers Work

[www.electronics.howstuffworks.com/gps.htm](http://www.electronics.howstuffworks.com/gps.htm)

How Guide Dog Works

[www.people.howstuffworks.com/guide-dog.htm](http://www.people.howstuffworks.com/guide-dog.htm)