



How to Steal a Dog

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Half of me was thinking, Georgina, don't do this. Stealing a dog is just plain wrong. The other half of me was thinking, Georgina, you're in a bad fix and you got to do whatever it takes to get yourself out of it.

Georgina Hayes is desperate. Ever since her father left and they were evicted from their apartment, her family has been living in their car. With her mama juggling two jobs and trying to make enough money to find a place to live, Georgina is stuck looking after her younger brother, Toby. And she has her heart set on improving their situation. When Georgina spots a missing-dog poster with a reward of five hundred dollars, the solution to all her problems suddenly seems within reach. All she has to do is "borrow" the right dog and its owners are sure to offer a reward. What happens next is the last thing she expected.

How to Steal a Dog is a 2008 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year. This title has Common Core connections.

How to Steal a Dog Details

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From Reader Review How to Steal a Dog for online ebook

Amy says

Georgina, her younger brother and mother are living in their car after their father walked out on the family. Her mother is working two jobs trying to earn enough money to get them a place to stay. Georgina wants to help and comes up with the idea of stealing a dog in order to get a reward for returning it. She keeps a journal of the steps she and her brother take along the way which ultimately helps her learn many lessons. Georgina feels pressures pile up as she falls behind in school, keeps secrets from her mother, lies to people she loves, mistreats a loving dog and treats a kind lady poorly. As if living in your car without enough to eat is bad enough, her scheme to help their situation puts further strain on her young mind.

As a teacher, this story made me think of how many things in students' lives are more important to them than completing homework and how we need to watch for changes which may indicate a child needs help.

Jillybean says

A Kearns library mother/daughter book club selection . . . read it in a day . . . a good, fun, enlightening read! Recommended for old and young alike!

Stephanie Weitzman says

This was a very good book, some excellent topics for discussion with my 4th grade emotional support students. It was a little difficult in the middle because it was very uncomfortable as the main character was making some very bad choices but I was pleased with where the story ended. This book had a very real portrayal of homelessness and poverty from the perspective of a child. The emotions were well described and the story was realistic. I enjoy using literature that explores social issues and this one explored many issues very completely! Well done, Ms. O'Connor, thank you for this story!

UPDATE: Finished the book today, we had 3 chapters left and it was our very last day of school. We had taken turns reading the whole book out loud but I finished up reading the final chapters to the group. There was a whole lot of emotion in those last chapters and a whole lot of wonderful discussion points, they loved it and enjoyed every literary nuance. It was very moving and so exciting and when I read the final words, they all applauded! What an amazing reaction! I thank you again, Ms. O'Connor, I believe my students learned some amazing pearls of wisdom from this book and will remember the lessons taught by Mookie and Georgina for the rest of their lives!

Addition.....the power of literature....today one of my students quoted this book, during a discussion about our past mistakes and our future choices she said, "Remember that book we read last year, this is kind of like that line when they said 'the trail you leave behind is not as important as the path ahead of you' " WOW....literature that MAKES A DIFFERENCE! Thank you Barbara OConnor, this troubled young lady has been changed by your words!

Patricia says

What a great story for fostering empathy! I applaud Emma's 4th-grade teacher for choosing this book for their latest lit circle selection.

Here are my favorite quotes from the story:

"Where do you live?" I said. ...

He opened his arms wide and said, "Out here. Outside."

"Outside?"

Mookie nodded. "Yep."

"How come?"

"Cause I don't have to paint the air or tar-paper the sky or mop the ground. All I got to do is breathe." (p. 111)

"Smart ain't got a thing to do with school," he said. "I never went past sixth grade, myself." he ate the soggy bread, then added, "And I'm pretty smart."

He licked his fingers. "Besides," he said, "if you ask me, school's about as useful as a trapdoor on a canoe."

"You can't get a job if you don't go to school," I said.

"Says who?"

"Says everybody."

"I work every day of my life," he said.

"Where?"

"Everywhere."

"Like where?" I said.

"Everywhere," he repeated. ...

"Then how come you live like a bum?" I said. I felt my face burn. I shouldn't have said that.

But Mookie just laughed. "I said I worked. I didn't say I got paid."

"You work for free?"

"Sometimes." ...

"But why would you do that stuff for free?"

"Cause sometimes people need stuff done more than I need money," he said. ... "Besides," he said, "I got a motto. You wanna hear it?"

I shrugged.

"Sometimes the trail you leave behind you is more important than the path ahead of you." (p. 131-132)

Heather says

This book goes against everything I believe in...Not sure why I got it to read...

These kids (& mom) are homeless...the main character, a girl, is a complete brat and at one point even blames her mom for being a bad mother since they are homeless (dad took the money & left...yet it was mom's fault)...

She decides to steal a dog in order to get reward \$\$ and is befriended by the woman whose dog she stole...I admit...I skimmed it after that...it just went against my entire belief system...

The end came out OK...she returned the dog (not sure if she got any money...skimmed that part) and told the woman that it was her that took the dog..

Don't recommend it even though it came out OK...

A. Riley says

Wow! This is a touching story that shined some light for me into the life of homelessness from a child's perspective. The main character, Georgina, deals with some tough times while living out of a car with her mother and younger brother. It is a real eye opener; reminding me not to take things for granted.

This is a must read for anyone who works with children, especially in a title I school setting. We may never know what our students are really going through outside of school.

2008-2009 Bluebonnet List

Marialena Vourthis says

I think this book was good because I like dogs, and this book was very adventure -like and surprising. This book was about a girl named Georgina that lived in a car with her mom, and brother. Their dad left them and took all their money so now they live in a car. When the mom finally makes enough money to buy a house they get this really haunted looking house because that is all they can afford. Once they start to get settled in the dog starts to run down the street and Georgina steals it. She hid the dog in a place where nobody can find it. One day Georgina meets an old lady who says she is missing her dog, and it is the one Georgina stole. They lady said if anyone can find it, they will get 200 dollars. So Georgina brought the dog back to the lady and told the lady what she did, and didn't want to take the money because she knew she did something wrong.

Rachel says

I would have cried a little, had I not been listening to this at work :)

Georgina and her family are recently homeless and living out of their car. Georgina is ashamed to live this way and lashes out toward her mother, who she blames, even though her mother is working multiple jobs and trying her best. The father is gone, and left them with nothing. Georgina has a younger brother named Toby.

Georgina finds a missing dog poster with a reward of 500 dollars. She gets the idea to steal someone's dog in order to obtain reward money. Georgina wants the money so that her family can afford an apartment. Her and Toby find a dog to steal, figuring that the owner was wealthy and would give a large reward sum.

Of course, nothing really goes as planned. The story explores right vs wrong, our assumptions and our implicit biases. for example, the children meet someone named Mookie, who is also homeless, and challenges their assumptions about "bums".

How Georgina deals with the aftermath of stealing a dog is a great lesson for young people.

Cairo Duran says

It was a good book because at the end the poor family lives with his mom co-worker.

Salina King says

I found this book to be very interesting and eye opening about homelessness and theft. While Georgina has the best intentions when she decides to steal a dog she learns that her actions affected others. This book is one I would use to show students that it is not okay to steal things and that regardless of your life situations there is always a positive if you look hard enough. Another aspect of this book that I enjoyed was how the author had characters in the book that helped Georgina come to the conclusion that she needed to return the dog without getting the reward money on her own. I also liked how the book provides a new perspective on someone who is homeless; some people might think that those who are homeless are lazy or jobless however this story shows that may not always be the case. I can see myself using this in my own classroom for sure.

Laura says

Georgina Hayes is a young girl whose father has just abandoned the family, leaving them to live in a car while her mother juggles two jobs and tries to get the family back on their feet. She concocts a plan to steal a dog in the hopes of returning it for a handsome reward. Unfortunately, Georgina quickly discovers that there are more potential complications to her plan than she and her third-grade brother and partner in crime can anticipate.

The story is told from Georgina's perspective and often uses a very conversational tone. O'Connor also employs a parallel structure where Georgina keeps a notebook detailing the instructions of "How to Steal a Dog." The story is set in modern-day North Carolina in the small, rural town of Darby. O'Connor uses a lot of southern colloquialisms and grammar that is not necessarily in keeping with Standard Written English, but the setting does not keep the story or characters from being relatable, and may actually be compelling for children who are southern or from small towns.

Georgina is the character that is fully developed in this short novel. We see some complexity in her mother who struggles to be there for her children as a mother while she is juggling low-paying jobs, trying to find a home for her family, and dealing with the absence of her husband. However, we don't get to know her very well. Georgina is a complex character, though, particularly for a short, young-adult novel. She is generally well-meaning and realizes that what she is planning to do is not right. She tries to justify the plot as what is necessary to help her family get back into a home. She comes to care about the dog and its owner but is unsure how to undo the damage she has done. She may be a difficult character for some readers to relate to, but if they are able to stick with it—and the novel is relatively short and easy to read—they will see that she

is forced into a desperate situation from terrible but real circumstances but still has a sense of right and wrong. The resolution to her family's story is nice but not overly tidy or unrealistic. The main plot may be slightly implausible, but it's not hard to imagine a homeless girl trying to concoct a plan to save her family. There is definitely a clear message about listening to one's conscience and remaining strong during trying times, but O'Connor avoids being overly preachy.

Cody Randles says

How to steal a dog by Barbara O'Conner is a book in the perspective of a young girl named Georgina. Who's family is struggling. Georgina, her brother, and her mother all live in a car because their father left them. Georgina has an idea that if she steals a dog she will get a reward for it and get good money. Soon to find out this isn't the case.

Georgina Hayes and her family are in need of hope after her father left them. They have been living in the same car and wearing the same clothes. Georgina hasn't told anybody that she's living like this not even her best friend who she tries to keep that a secret from. Georgina passes by a lost dog sign and figures that she could steal a dog, then return it and get money from it and help her family out. After plotting for a while Georgina finally steals the dog she's been wanting to steal. Then she finds out that the owner of the dog is struggling just as bad as Georgina and her family. So she returns the dog and goes back to just living life.

My overall thoughts on this book was enjoyable. The author definitely made you feel lucky to live a life not as poor as the characters in the story. It's very interesting to find out how the characters interact with the struggles that they have and how they work through them. I believe the message for this book was to not cheat off of life by getting fake rewards because you have to actually work for your rewards, and I do agree with the message.

My ultimate judgement on this book was good. The book is very entertaining and increasing the knowledge of how bad people might be struggling just to get some extra cash. I would recommend this book at a middle school level. However if you are just looking for a good and entertaining book to read I do recommend this one.

Crystal Gutierrez says

I thought this book was pretty amazing. this book is realistic fiction.....the title also sounds pretty interesting.SO..this book is about this little family...the mom, the little brother and the big sister. this family is kind of poor and the girl named Georgina wanted to steal a dog....I wouldn't steal a dog, would you? so anyways yeah she wanted to steal a dog to be able to get some money by selling it. I wonder what will she do with the money that she gets by selling the dog.....probably food, new clothes, an apartment.....because actually they don't even live at an apartment..They actually sleep at a car. So yeah.

Once there was this family...mom, Georgina (big sister), and Toby (little brother). Georgina kept on reading her rules about stealing a dog over and over again...because one side of her said, that GEORGINA you can't do this, stealing a dog is really bad and wrong...and the other side of her said GEORGINA you can do this your in a bad fix and you have to do whatever it takes to get out of it. she must be in a really bad position right

now because....what would u rather do?Steal a dog for your own good to get the money you need.....or to not steal the dog because its really bad and you should never steal anything.So yeah Georgina is really desperate right now because IMAGINE..living and sleeping in a car,not having that much food, and its kind of embarrassing because since she goes to school and when she get out of her school students always see her going into the car right a way..EVERY SINGLE DAY...SO THEY ARE PROBABLY THINKING THAT SHE LIVES IN THE CAR...but then she just says that she is waiting for her mom..and stuff.

so,then that's when Georgina THINKS about stealing a dog because of the money.She tells her little brother,Toby,that that's their plan from now on,but she also said that ,HE CAN NEVER EVER TELL ANYONE ABOUT THIS!!!!Then he says "OK". So next,they go outside and walk around the neighborhood to try and find a dog to steal..but FIRST,they have to think about it and start writing plans like:Stealing a dog that doesn't bark,so that the owners or anybody wont hear the dog...And thinking that their stealing the dog,also the dog must not BITE,the dog must be outside by its self,so that nobody(owner)would see them when their stealing the dog,AND FINALLY,that the dog has to be a beautiful dog that everybody would want to have and not any ugly dog that nobody would care for.

Meanwhile,Georgina found the perfect dog and named it willy.So the next day Georgina and her little brother,Toby,went to go see the dog and try to steal it.....Georgina told Toby that he should be the guard and whistle once he sees a car or something,while Georgina is trying to get the dog.so I guess the dog all ready knows her or something because he starts wagging his tail super fast and licking Georgina's hand....Then she pulled out her string out of her pocket and tied it to willys collar then she said"lets go"So next Georgina takes the dog to this house in the woods where nobody lives and nobody knows,meanwhile the owner finds out that his/her dog is missing, and then he/she is going to put a sigh probably saying that she will give some money to that person(which is GEORGINA)who ever finds the dog.

In conclusion,Georgina gave the dog back to the owner and commented that she was the one who had stole their dog.The owner(Carmella)said "WHAT" Then Georgina repeated her self and said that she was the one who had stole their dog and she stayed silence for a long time then said that she did a really bad thing and that she better not do that again.Then Georgina said "sorry"but then finally Georgina was happily ever after when her mom had told her that "lets go kids....WE R LIVING IN A HOUSE FROM NOW ON!!!then they got super happy and Georgina stared thinking that now that they live at a house....Friends could come over and have a sleepover and stuff like that.AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER!^.^I think this book is a 5 star because its a really good book that tells you a lot of information and tells you good things of whats happening next and you stay amazed..Like i wonder whats going to happen next...And you would never want to stop reading this book it until your done.:)

Cheryl says

How to Steal a Dog is about a young girl who is homeless and lives out of a car after her dead-beat dad leaves the family. She tries to keep up pretenses that her family is still intact and doing great, but her unkempt appearance from washing in public restrooms is causing suspicions. She hatches a plan to steal a beloved pet from a house where the mailbox name matches the name of the whole street - evidently a family of means. Each day, she teaches her little brother the on-going plan of kidnapping a dog and collecting a

reward for it. This reward will surely pay the deposit for a home, she figures.

A stranger tries to guide her with a different way of thinking, but she persists. Her plan meets with unexpected results.

The lesson here is very muddled. Is it ok to steal if you are poor? Disrespectful attitudes, manipulation, coarse treatment of younger siblings, and other such vices are not sufficiently dealt with. Does she learn a lesson or just fail to get her way?

Steve says

I got close to marking this novella as DNF, and moving on, but I preserved. I found the main character to be far too stuck-up for my liking, and her constant whining was rather irritating. The story developed quickly, and I'm glad at least that I didn't guess the big reveal at the end of the book.
