

Fantasy

A Dog's Life



by Megan Howard
illustrated by Russ Willms

Read to Find Out

Is Wendell's fantasy about living the life of a dog all he thought it would be?

STRATEGIES & SKILLS AT A GLANCE

Comprehension

- Strategy: Generate Questions
- Skill: Distinguish Between Fantasy and Reality

Vocabulary

- ached, admire, bothering, concentrate, dangerous, passion, splendid

Vocabulary Strategy

- Dictionary: Multiple-Meaning Words

Word count: 1,914

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A Walk in the Woods



I stuck my nose in the air and breathed deeply. "Aaaaaah," I sighed. The air was fresh. Green leaves were sprouting on the tree branches. Animals were running about. It was a splendid spring day.

Actually, it was the perfect day for a fresh start. You see, I'm a lone wolf. I used to be in a wolf pack, but they threw me out. Ever since then, I've been roaming the forest and looking for a new group of friends.

Unfortunately, that's turned out to be more difficult than I'd anticipated. Wolf packs prefer to keep outsiders out. After a long, cold winter, I hadn't found a pack to join, and I was very lonely.

Then I realized there might be another possibility. I hadn't been hanging out with any other animals. From what I saw as I went roaming, there were many different kinds. So what if I hadn't found a pack of wolves? Maybe I'd be happier in a gaggle of geese, a herd of elephants, a pride of lions, or a school of fish.

I crossed through the forest, looking everywhere for new friends.



Before long, I heard some birds twittering a beautiful song up in a tree. I howled a hello, "Aaaaaa-oooooo!"

The frightened birds took one look at me, flapped their wings, and flew away. In fact, animals I hadn't even noticed scattered. Every squirrel, deer, and mouse looked for a place to hide.

"Why does this always happen to me?" I wondered. Sure, I got hungry every once in a while, but who didn't? Blame my appetite. Don't blame me.

Maybe it had something to do with those horrible wolf stories human beings always told their children. I knew that those terrifying tales weren't good for the kids. Now I realized they weren't good for me either.

I sat down on a rock to think things over. I was certain that if others got to know me better, they would like me. But how could they get to know me better if they ran away every time I got near them?

There was only one solution. I'd find out more about the animals who live in the forest. I'd study their diet, where they spend their time, and what they do for fun. Then I'd try to engage them in conversation and impress them with my knowledge. After all, everyone enjoys talking about themselves. Then they'd begin to understand that I'm not a bad fellow.



The Science Project

The next day, I was anxious to put my plan into action. The usual place to research animals is in the library, but the library is full of books about dangerous wolves. I knew I had to look like a person to get in.

I went to my closet, put on a suit and tie, and looked in the mirror. Something was missing. I slipped a pair of glasses onto my nose. "Perfect," I said to myself and then headed into town.

I had always heard that the library was a quiet place, so I was surprised by all of the chattering.



"I have to come up with a topic for my science fair project," I overheard a boy tell his friend. "I have no idea what to select."

I didn't feel sorry for him at all. At least he could be himself. I had to dress up as if I was going to a costume party just to do a little library research.

He wouldn't stop talking about his little problem, so I moved to the other side of the library. Away from the noise, it was easier to concentrate.

I flipped through a stack of books and took notes about animal habits. I started by researching rabbits. I never knew their ears could move in all directions! I opened another book and read about beavers. It was fascinating to discover that their front teeth never stop growing. I was learning many amazing facts and was sure the other animals would be impressed.

While I was looking for information about deer, the book fell open to a page with an animal that looked a lot like me. But instead of being a wolf, it was a dog. "Cool!" I thought and kept reading.

I discovered that dogs and wolves are related. "Hmmm. I wonder how they live?" I quietly asked. I continued reading, and the answer nearly knocked me out of my chair.

They live in houses with comfortable beds. Sometimes they make friends with other animals in the house, and human beings love them! People give them food in a bowl, buy them toys, and cuddle them. Some people even call them "man's best friend."



No Place Like Home

I went outside the library, removed my disguise, and threw it in the bushes. Then I hid next to the building and waited for the boy to come out.

"Psst," I whispered when I saw him. I stepped out, so he could see me clearly.

He looked around and said, "Hi." He didn't look surprised at all. This was going better than I had expected.

"I'm Wendell Wolf," I said, introducing myself.

"I'm Jed," he answered. "You look very much like a dog. Are you really a wolf?"



I gasped and wondered whether this information could really be true. After all, I was practically a dog, and nobody played with me. I was angry, but I also had to admire dogs. People were almost their servants.

A voice interrupted my thoughts. "Can I use that when you're finished?" The boy with the science fair project was pointing to the book in front of me.

I handed him the book, and then I came up with a plan.



I rolled my eyes and assured him that I was positively a wolf. I looked around to make sure nobody was listening. He wasn't afraid of me, but I had a definite feeling others would be.

I explained that I had an unusual idea for his science project. "You could bring me home to live with your family. You'd train me and prove that a wild wolf can be taught to act like a lovable dog."

Overjoyed, Jed agreed with my plan.

"Just one more thing," I explained. "You should probably tell your parents that your project is about dog training." From what I knew from fairy tales, adults were more frightened of wolves than children.

It was a Friday when I arrived at Jed's house. For the next few days life as a dog was fabulous. Jed's house was amazing! Soft carpets covered every floor, and I barely did anything for myself. Jed made certain I had fresh water and food. He brushed my fur until it was as soft as cotton.



I contributed to Jed's science project and learned all the tricks he taught me. I was a good student, but I mostly acted like a sweet family pet.

I also learned the differences between life as a wolf and life as a dog. I howled less and barked more. I resisted the urge to snack on squirrels. And when other dogs came toward me, I didn't challenge them for territory.

Into the Wild

"Rise and shine, sleepyhead!" Jed's father called upstairs.

"It's Monday," Jed mumbled. I followed him as he slowly descended the stairs.

June was already sitting in her chair, eating a bowl of cereal. She barely looked at me as she scooped food into her mouth. Jed poured his own bowl of cereal and joined her. Their parents darted back and forth across the room, moving in opposite directions.

I sat next to Jed and tilted my head sideways to look up at him. He was too busy to notice. In search of a prize, he had shoved his entire hand and half of his arm into a giant cereal box.



When Jed and his sister June took me outside to catch a ball, other kids abandoned their lemonade stands, quit their basketball games, and leapt off their bicycles. Instead of running away, they surrounded us and petted me.

In the evening, I curled up next to Jed's feet. I fell into a nice sound sleep on his comfortable bed.

I finally had friends, and people loved me. Life as a dog was definitely much better than life as a wolf. I even didn't mind June calling me "Fluffy."



June seemed to be in some sort of morning trance. She didn't even notice the drips of milk sliding down her chin each time she scooped a spoonful of cereal from the bowl to her mouth.

"Disgusting," I thought. I silently wondered what I could do to get the morning off to a better start.

Their mother hurried into the kitchen as if she had read my mind. "Hurry up, you two! You're going to be late for school."

My ears perked up. School? I couldn't wait! I was actually going to school. There would be hundreds of kids there. They would all love me. I ran upstairs to get my brush for Jed. Today my appearance would be more important than ever.

When I came down, Jed's family was racing out the front door. My heart ached. They weren't taking me to school.



Suddenly, although I thought I was alone in the house, I had the feeling someone was watching me. Scanning the room, I noticed a cat standing on the rug in front of me. His back was arched, and his teeth were showing. He looked like a fur-covered, hissing statue.

"Where did that thing come from?" I wondered. I quickly solved the mystery. This was the old family pet. He had made himself scarce when I appeared. With Jed's family away, he was here to challenge me. A scrawny, silly cat was standing up to me. I was beginning to long for the days when animals fled at the sight of me. I ignored the feline and took a nap.



I was overjoyed when my new family finally got home. But they still didn't have time for me. Jed and June had to do their homework, and their parents rushed around making dinner.

The next morning was exactly the same. After school, Jed ran in, filled up my dog bowls, put on his soccer uniform, and ran back outside. When he and his family finally came home, they went straight to bed.

How could they do this to me? I was their precious pet. My family was supposed to pay attention to me and adore me.

Life didn't improve. The only time Jed ever did anything with me was when we were working on the science project. And that wasn't really fun for me.



Finally, on Saturday morning, June put on my collar and took me outside. Little kids came from every direction, wanting to pet me. I had never noticed before how sticky their hands could be. And one child tried to ride me like a horse. As she held onto my collar, I noticed it wasn't very tight. I realized I could easily slip my head right out.

After that horrible week, all of my passion to live the dog's life was gone. As soon as possible, I wiggled out of my collar. Without bothering to look back, I raced toward the woods. The other animals scrambled and flew away, but I didn't care. After all, I was a wolf.



Comprehension Check

Summarize

Use a Fantasy and Reality Chart to record the real and the fantasy events in the story. Then use your chart to summarize the story.

Fantasy	Reality

Think and Compare

1. Look at pages 2 and 3. What clues tell you that the story is a fantasy? (**Distinguish Between Fantasy and Reality**)
2. If you had been in the library and met up with Wendell Wolf, how would you have reacted? Why? (**Synthesize**)
3. Wendell ends up unhappy as a pet dog. What do you think families should do to keep pets healthy and happy? (**Evaluate**)

Literacy Activities



Back in the Woods

Pretend you are Wendell. Use Wendell's own words to describe what happened to you during your first week back in the woods. How did you feel about living in the wild again?



It's A Wolf's Life!

Use the Internet or the library to find out about wolves. You might research what wolves look like, what they eat, and where they can be found. Find out if wolves are endangered. Share your information with the class.

A Dog's Life

Many believe that a dog's life is terrific.
Is that always true?



3.2 Week 2

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