Can I Be Your Dog?
The 2019 CLEL Bell Award Book for WRITE

by Troy Cummings
Random House Books for Young Readers, 2018

Arfy is a dog who lives in a box in an alley. As he explores his neighborhood looking for a new home, Arfy write letters to everyone he meets describing the ways he’d be a great pet. This story models many different styles of writing and how writing is used to communicate with others.

Activity Ideas for Can I Be Your Dog?:

• During Arfy’s travels, he explores his neighborhood, meets people, and discovers new places. Take a walk around your neighborhood! What are some of the places you see? Do these places or buildings have signs with words or pictures that help to tell us what they are? How about the objects in our neighborhood? Do mailboxes, delivery trucks, street signs, or trash bins have words on them, too? An important pre-reading step for children is to understand that print is all around us, not just in books.

• After reading Can I Be Your Dog? try singing songs with your child about dogs and other pets. When you sing songs with children, they hear both familiar and new words in ways that can help them understand the meanings of those words. You might sing Where O Where Has My Little Dog Gone?, Mary Had a Little Lamb, I Had a Little Turtle Whose Name Was Tiny Tim, or Soft Kitty Warm Kitty. Or have children help you think of dog vocabulary to make up your own words to If You’re Happy and You Know It:
  If you’re a doggy and you know it clap your paws
  If you’re a doggy and you know it wag your tail
  If you’re a doggy and you know it bark like this: Woof! Woof!

• While looking for a home, Arfy writes a series of letters. Encourage children to practice their fine motor skills by writing or drawing a letter to a pet. Or they could pretend to be a pet and write a letter or draw a picture to you! Writing and drawing help children understand that print conveys meaning, and helps them see the connection between the things they write and draw and the words and pictures they see in books.

The CLEL Bell Picture Book Awards are given to books that provide excellent support of early literacy development in young children. For more information and for other activity sheets, visit http://www.cel.org and select the CLEL Bell Awards tab.

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