

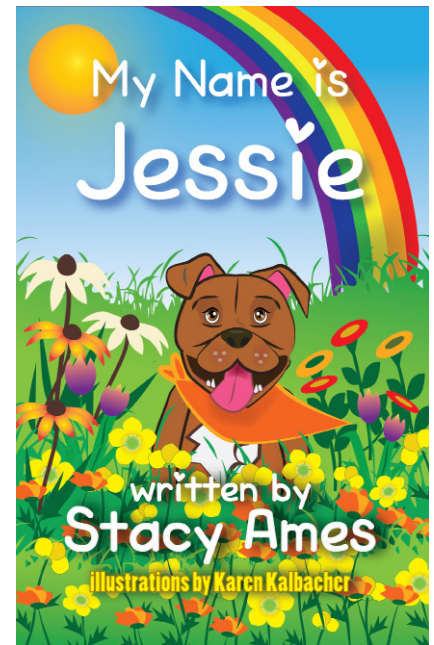


Teaching Guide/Notes

For the Award Winning

My Name is Jessie

by Stacy Ames



Good children's books are hard to write because you have a lot of messaging to get across within a short amount of time, with a small number of words and a limited vocabulary to work with. That is why messaging within the illustrations is so important when you have layers to the story, as *My Name is Jessie* has.

The purpose of *My Name is Jessie* is to help children become more sympathetic, empathetic and compassionate. According to FBI statistics, there is a direct link between animal cruelty and violence towards humans; it is a societal issue. The book also models good dog ownership.

My Name is Jessie is age appropriate for children aged four to seven. The two hemispheres of the brain do not fuse together until this time period. Before age four, children cannot feel remorse or higher level emotions such as sympathy, empathy and compassion. This book capitalizes on the small window of time to tap into critical emotions in a healthy and positive way. Kids develop a sense of self at a young age.

When confronted with something new, a physiological event takes place in the brain. A synapse fires and neurons carve a pathway. *My Name is Jessie* is a bridge to that learning event: the firing of synapses to embed sympathy, empathy and compassion, joy and love. Emotions—so named from the Latin word, “to move”—need to be labeled and are labeled throughout the book. Labeling is very important because we want the reader to connect with these emotions. If you can link someone else's life or their experience to your own, that allows a bridge for understanding, and for sympathy, empathy and compassion to rise.

You've heard the saying that children are born with a clean slate and we write on it. As parents and caregivers, teachers and invested grown-ups, we are charged with either raising kids who are sympathetic, empathetic and compassionate OR...the other option is raising kids without any emotional intelligence to be aware of others who they're sharing the planet with. And we all know they grow up to become adults, one way or the other.

There's a tendency to not want your child to feel any discomfort. However, the problem with that is that we “rescue” them from their greatest moment of learning—their greatest moment of emotional growth. I urge you not to “rescue” your child from experiencing these heartstring pulling emotions. If you need a tissue, don't worry; the same tissue can be used for the joyful, happily-ever-after ending as well! In other words, let those synapses fire, let the nervous system activate. Let your child develop and you revel in having a front row seat!



Let's get cozy and read...

Cover: The messaging starts immediately with the cover art. A rainbow is a universal sign. Rainbows represent inclusiveness, promises, and in the Chinese tradition, yin and yang. This book is for everybody!

Teal paw print page: The paw prints throughout the book subconsciously represent movement. We don't want the young reader to stop at the sad parts. Jessie did not give up...follow the paw prints to the happy ending!

Based on a true story: Jessie's story is true yet modified for young children. The adult information is contained in the blog under the Resource tab of www.mynameisjessie.com

Pages 1 and 2: Jessie starts her life alone and without even a name. This is the baseline at which we start, which is about as low as you can go. The fact that the first page says she doesn't even have a name immediately begs the questions, Why?, What happened?, How did she get her name?

Pages 3 and 4: The beginning of the book is dark, gloomy. Jessie is in bad shape. Hungry and scared. Emotions are labeled throughout the story.

Pages 5 and 6: Real life event, yet age appropriate.

Pages 7 and 8: The only page with people so it is important to show diversity.

Pages 9 and 10: Notice the sun starts to appear when she has hope. Optimistic. Side note: Jessie's story sadly parallels the foster care system in the United States.

Pages 11 and 12: The sun goes away. Just because a dog is rescued or adopted, that doesn't guarantee a good life—unless it's by the right person. Jessie's happiness goes away and she is sad and afraid. Another message is that people think dogs/animals are disposable. They are not.

Pages 13 and 14: The sun appears and Jessie has hope again. She is still roughed up. Another message is that crating your dog for extended hours is detrimental.

Pages 15 and 16: The sun is gone. Scared and confused.

Pages 17 and 18: Notice in this sequence there wasn't even a sun of hope prior. Jessie is close to giving up. Chaining a dog outside is abusive.



Pages 19 and 20: FINALLY! Second half of the book. Huge burst of contrast, full sun, vibrant colors. Educates and models how to properly treat and care for a dog.

Pages 21 and 22: Topic of conditional vs. unconditional love. Safety is key. If children feel safe, they can take risks, ask questions, make mistakes, learn to trust, and share their feelings. This idea bridges Jessie to the child. Kids giggle at the poop but that's a fact of dog ownership!

Pages 23 and 24: Transformation page—Jessie is not skinny and roughed up any more. Still a big world out there but it's not gloomy and scary like the beginning of the story. She has a good life because she has trust and unconditional love. Full sun.

Pages 25 and 26: Shows doing an act of compassion. Someone doing something to help—even if it's a little thing, is still compassion. Convey to young children that despite their age, they can still perform compassionate deeds. If children can witness themselves being compassionate, that builds a sense of self that they *are* compassionate.

Pages 27 and 28: Fact: train your dog! It is a very important part of dog ownership.

Pages 29 and 30: 'Promise' is a significant word and subliminally ties back to the rainbow. 'Sad' is *now* tied to 'never'.

Pages 31 and 32: Jessie started without any names and now she has *extra* names. Explain the arc of the beginning page of the book to present. Full sun. Buttercups are the flower she likes to smell-link to her nickname.

Pages 33 and 34: Jessie's dreams came true and she lived happily ever after! For parents reading it as a bedtime story, it's the perfect transition to go nite-nite! Fun fact: Jessie sleeps exactly like that with her Bear named Bearzey! Four point star for symbolism.

Pages 35 and 36: Woof/ The End.



Interactive Questions:

The **questions** included in the book are a crucial element to the mission of the book.

The purpose of the book is to help children become more sympathetic, empathetic and compassionate. These emotions need to be experienced, elicited. There is no short cut- you have to go *through it*. There is also great value in having a child observe another modeling sympathy, empathy and compassion.

Children benefit from being **deeper thinkers**. However, today, so much thinking is surface level, disposable, consumer-minded thinking. *My Name is Jessie* is a path to critical thinking and emotional intelligence.

You can't give away what you don't have.

The following are simple **definitions** I like to use:

Sympathy: The awareness of sorrow or suffering in another. Feeling of pity or feeling bad for another. It is the foundational emotion from which higher emotions form—so we have to start here.

Empathy: A much stronger sense of experience than sympathy. Empathy is experiencing what the other experiences as if you were them—albeit through imagination. They hurt=You hurt. While sympathy drives disconnection, empathy fuels connection.

Compassion: Consciousness of others' distress plus a desire to alleviate it, or help. The drive to alleviate another's distress. It is a verb of action/doing something about it. For children, an act of compassion can be small. Don't want kids to think the compassionate act needs to be big and therefore, only for grown-ups. It is key that children witness themselves doing acts of compassion. Children develop a sense of self at a young age so witnessing themselves being compassionate tells them "who they are", as well as building self-confidence.



1. **What feelings does Jessie go through?** Emotions need to be labeled. They are labeled throughout the book. Validate the young readers' synonyms (ex. Jessie was confused=Jessie didn't know or understand).
2. **Have you ever felt those feelings?** This is a "bridge question". Start making a connection from Jessie to the reader—forming a bridge or a link. If you can link someone else's life or their experiences to your own, then that allows a bridge and understanding, sympathy, empathy and compassion can rise.
3. **Have you ever seen a dog like Jessie?** This question will tell you at what level the child is. It is not to judge. Example: If a child says:
 - * "Yes, I have seen a brown dog"—that is no emotional connection.
 - * If a child says, "Yes, I have seen a dog like Jessie and I felt bad"—that is sympathy.
 - * If a child says, "Yes, I have seen a dog like Jessie being mistreated and it made me cry"—that is empathy.
 - * If a child says something along the lines of, "Yes, I saw a dog like Jessie being mistreated and it made me cry *and* I told my mom *and/or* we called the humane society or police *and/or* we took food to the animal shelter, etc." That is compassion: empathy with action. Compassion is a *verb*.
4. **How would you treat Jessie?** Critical thinking question of taking the whole of the story and forming a life plan. Promotes thinking into the future as well as having the child think deeper. The story gave some answers—see if the reader absorbed it and/or expanded on it.
5. **Describe how your life is. Use pictures or words.** A "bridge activity." Relating Jessie's life to their own life. The child can talk or draw a picture. Give the child space and time to share in a safe environment. This is a critical question. Be prepared for whatever answer you may receive and respond with modeling sympathy, empathy and compassion.

About the Author page: We are partnered with animal shelters, rescues and humane societies and generously give back a portion of the profits to help save other dogs like Jessie.



My Name is Jessie And I Want a Friend

Jessie's award winning story **continues** as she longs for a friend. Although she has a loving home, others do not include her and she encounters bullies. Her trials parallel what young children often encounter at school, on the playground and in life. Finally, the best day happens when she meets Fred! The two pals show what true friendship is all about.

The arc of her story elicits feelings of sympathy, empathy, compassion, kindness, inclusiveness and joy. Jessie's universal need and desire for **friendship** is a message embraced by even the littlest of readers. While still being age appropriate, *My Name is Jessie and I Want a Friend* is a heartstring pulling story. Tapping into these emotions in young children is vital for their development as well as making the world a better place...for both the four-legged and two-legged. Includes discussion questions.

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