

Paired text to "Across the Lake"

How to Say "I Ruff You"

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Maria was fixing a second cup of hot chocolate when she heard her brother crying. It was a cold February 14th, but the back door was cracked open. Danny was on the stoop in his winter coat, his arm wrapped tightly around Sherlock. Danny was seven years old. Sherlock was two. They were best friends in the world, despite the age difference, because Sherlock was a chocolate Labrador—a dog who looked so much like a dog, Maria was surprised he had never been asked to model for a pet food company.

She cupped her hands around the warm mug and listened through the doorway. It wasn't nice to eavesdrop, she knew, but she couldn't help herself. And who knows? Maybe if she knew why Danny was crying, she would be able to help.

"Everybody has a valentine but me," he said. "Daddy has Mommy. Grandpa has Grandma. All the people on TV are in love. Even Maria traded valentines with her best friend. But I didn't get a card, a lollipop, nothing. Does that seem fair to you?"

Lots of people talk to their dogs. They say things like, "Who's a good boy? You are! You are!" and "Sit!" or "Bad dog!" But Danny went further than that. He and Sherlock had *conversations*. Each night when he set the dog's food bowl out for him, Danny would wait until Sherlock had had a few bites before asking, just like a waiter in a restaurant, "if everything was to your satisfaction." When he came home from school, and Sherlock would bound up toward

him, licking his face and knocking his books to the ground, Danny would say, "Hiya, boy! How's it going? What did you do today?" And each time he took Sherlock for a walk, Danny would ask him, "So—where to?"

Not only would Danny ask the dog questions, he would wait for answers, nodding his head and saying, "Hmmm..." and "uh-huh." Not only did he talk to the dog, he actually took his advice! Once, Maria asked Danny: "Why do you pay such close attention to what the dog has to say? He's barely older than a puppy."

"Yeah," said Danny, "but he's fourteen in dog years. That means he's older than me. Sherlock is very wise."

Maria couldn't argue with that.

Most of the time, Danny and the dog had a good relationship, but like all friends, they had their occasional spats. The summer before, Maria saw Danny storm in from the front yard, fuming, as Sherlock looked on from the door.

"What's the matter?" she said.

"All he wants to talk about is dog stuff!"

Maria couldn't argue with that either. But even when he was fighting with Sherlock, Maria had never seen her brother look so sad. She took a sip of her hot chocolate and heard Danny stand up. To avoid being seen, she ran out of the kitchen as fast as she could without spilling hot chocolate on her hands—this was not very fast—and went back to her room. She had

some thinking to do. The valentine she'd gotten from her best friend sat on her bedside table. She cradled it in her hands and read it for what seemed like the thousandth time that week.

To Maria—The Greatest Friend A Girl Could Ever Have. Love, From Your Forever Valentine, Angela.

It was a handmade card, because Angela believed that buying a card at the store meant you didn't really care about the person. She'd drawn a picture of a butterfly on the front—Maria's favorite insect—and inside was a picture of the Eiffel Tower, because they were always dreaming of what it would be like to go to Paris. The letters were written precisely, in turquoise-colored pencil, because everyone knows that turquoise is the best color. And every surface was covered with glitter.

It was the finest valentine in the world. Danny was right. It wasn't fair at all that he didn't have one of his own. She took down her crafts kit—glitter, paper and dozens of glue sticks—and got to work. She would have to write with her left hand.

Danny sat at his desk, staring at his homework. He felt rotten. Valentine's Day was rotten. Homework was rotten. The whole world, he was beginning to suspect, was probably rotten, too. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't make himself do his math homework. He needed a snack.

Danny trudged into the kitchen, hungry for pretzels. And there, on the counter, he saw a box of chocolates—just another reminder he was nobody's valentine.

"I'll show them what love is," he said. "I'm going to eat that whole box of chocolates. I don't care who they belong to."

But as he lifted the box, he saw that the chocolates belonged to him. A note, written in turquoise-colored pencil, was taped to the box and said: *To Danny*. He opened the flap and saw the most beautiful drawing he'd ever seen: a picture of him petting his dog. Above was a message, written in handwriting that was pretty shaky, but still readable.

*To Danny—The Greatest Owner A Dog Could Ever Have. Love, Your Forever Valentine—
Sherlock.*

Danny raced outside and gave Sherlock the biggest hug he'd ever given him.

"Oh, boy!" he said. "I love you, too!"

Maria listened through her bedroom window. She knew it was rude to eavesdrop, but she just couldn't help herself.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is Sherlock?

- A a fish
- B a bird
- C a cat
- D a dog

2. What is the climax of this story?

- A Danny sits on the stoop with Sherlock and cries.
- B Maria eavesdrops on Danny talking to Sherlock.
- C Maria rereads the valentine she received from Angela.
- D Danny finds a valentine for him in the kitchen.

3. Read the following statements by Danny from the story: "Everybody has a valentine but me," he said. "Daddy has Mommy. Grandpa has Grandma. All the people on TV are in love. Even Maria traded valentines with her best friend. But I didn't get a card, a lollipop, nothing. Does that seem fair to you?"

What can be concluded from these statements?

- A Danny believes that watching too much TV is harmful.
- B Danny is upset because he does not have a valentine.
- C Danny is glad that he does not have a valentine.
- D Danny wishes that Maria's best friend were his valentine.

4. How does Maria feel toward Danny?

- A Maria cares a lot about Danny.
- B Maria does not get along with Danny.
- C Maria is very jealous of Danny.
- D Maria thinks Danny is boring.

5. What is the theme of this story?

- A Cats make better pets than dogs because they are easier to take care of.
- B Knowing that others care about them makes people feel good.
- C Girls are more sensitive to other people's feelings than boys are.
- D Boys are more sensitive to other people's feelings than girls are.

6. Read the following sentences from the story: "Maria listened through her bedroom window. She knew it was rude to eavesdrop, but **she just couldn't help herself.**"

What does the phrase "**she just couldn't help herself**" mean above?

- A Everything Maria did by herself turned out wrong.
- B Maria was in trouble but could not do anything about it.
- C Maria could not stop herself from listening.
- D Maria could not figure out what to do next.

7. Select the word that best completes the sentence.

Danny has a valentine the end of the story; _____, he did not.

- A earlier
- B later on
- C for example
- D moreover

8. What does Maria do after rereading her valentine from Angela?

9. According to the note that Danny finds, who is his valentine from?

10. Who is Danny's valentine actually from? Explain your answer, using evidence from the story.
