

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Babe, the Gallant Pig

by
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Book Information

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Babe, the piglet won by Farmer Hogget at a fair, learns to be a sheep-pig.

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Main Characters

Babe the intelligent and adaptable pig who decides to make the best of his new life on a sheep farm by learning to herd sheep; he goes against the advice of Fly and addresses the sheep with polite words

Farmer Hogget the kind-hearted and open-minded farmer who recognizes Babe's talent and trains him to become an award-winning sheep-pig instead of slaughtering him for a Christmas ham

Fly the competent and motherly sheepdog who nurtures Babe and teaches him to herd sheep; she changes her attitude about sheep after she realizes that being polite to them is more effective than bullying them

Ma the elderly and sickly ewe whom Babe befriends in his first effort to talk to the sheep; she dies when a pair of dogs attack the flock

Mrs. Hogget the talkative wife of Farmer Hogget, who changes her mind about butchering Babe when Babe saves the sheep from rustlers; she is unaware of Babe's sheep herding accomplishments until she sees Babe on television winning the Grand Challenge Trials

Vocabulary

dale a valley

ewe a female sheep

gallant brave and polite

hocks the ankles of an animal

paddock a fenced area for exercising animals

spectator someone who watches; an observer

Synopsis

When Farmer Hogget wins a piglet named Babe at the fair, Mrs. Hogget looks forward to eating ham. Fly, the farm's sheepdog, takes pity on Babe, and mothers him along with her puppies. When the puppies are sold to other farmers, Babe asks Fly to teach him to herd sheep. Fly is amused, but she has Babe practice on the ducks. Babe is unsuccessful at herding the ducks, so Babe asks Fly if the ducks would cooperate if he treated them politely. Fly explains that sheep and ducks are stupid and will respond to nothing but brute force and harsh commands.

Later that day, Babe gets to try out his manners on a sick ewe who is in the stable. Babe impresses the ewe with his politeness. Ma, the ewe, says that sheep call the dogs wolves because the dogs are rude. When Ma returns to the pasture, Babe plans to visit her.

The next week, Babe goes up the hill to visit the flock but finds strangers attempting to herd the sheep onto a truck. Ma tells him the sheep are being stolen, and Babe politely asks the sheep to stop following the rustlers. He then attacks the rustlers' dogs, and the resulting noise and confusion scare the rustlers off. When Mrs. Hogget realizes that Babe has saved the flock, she changes her mind about butchering Babe.

The next day, Farmer Hogget takes both Babe and Fly to the pasture. When the sheep rebel at Fly's rude ways, Fly angrily forces the sheep to obey. Farmer Hogget is surprised and impulsively commands Babe to herd the sheep. In response to

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Babe's politeness, the sheep calmly obey. Both Fly and Farmer Hogget are impressed.

After Babe shows his ability, Farmer Hogget begins to use him regularly. Fly is happy to relax, and Babe gradually takes over her duties. Farmer Hogget then decides to train Babe to compete in the sheepdog trials. He sets up a practice course, but Fly notices that Babe's lack of speed is a problem. She advises Babe to eat less and exercise more.

One day Babe is running for exercise when he discovers the sheep being attacked by two strange dogs. Babe defends the sheep by chasing the dogs away, but he is too late to save Ma. He tries to help her by licking her wounds, but she dies. Farmer Hogget and Fly arrive just in time to see the flock in disarray and a bloody Babe by the dead ewe. Farmer Hogget commands Fly to watch the sheep and orders Babe to go home. Hogget drives back to the farm and gets his gun, but before he shoots Babe, Mrs. Hogget calls out to tell him that the police have telephoned to inform them that some dogs are roving the neighborhood attacking sheep. Hogget sees that Babe has some dog hairs stuck to his mouth and realizes that Babe had been protecting the sheep, not attacking them. In the meantime, Fly is in the pasture worried that Babe has become a sheep killer. She tries to command the sheep to tell her what happened, but the sheep are too agitated by her harshness to explain. Finally, she tries politeness, and the surprised sheep tell her that Babe saved them.

After Babe's rescue of the sheep, Farmer Hogget enters Babe in the Grand Challenge Sheepdog Trials. He enters Babe under the name Pig, knowing that the judges will assume this is the name of his dog. Fly, however, is worried that the strange sheep at the trials will run from Babe before Babe has a chance to talk to them. She asks the sheep for help. They tell her a password that sheep use to identify their friends, and Fly has Babe memorize it.

On the day of the Grand Challenge Trials, Mrs. Hogget is surprised when Farmer Hogget loads Babe up in the truck along with Fly. She does not

know that Babe herds sheep, and she is puzzled by her husband's actions. Farmer Hogget merely tells her to watch the trials on television. When it is Babe's turn to compete, the highest score so far is 85 points out of 100 because the dogs have struggled with bad weather conditions. When Hogget approaches the start with Babe, the judges initially protest, but then confer and determine that the rules do not prohibit pigs, and Babe is allowed to begin. Babe calls out the password as he heads towards the sheep, and they do not run away. Babe politely explains what he wants the sheep to do and then leads the sheep so expertly through the course that he receives a perfect score of 100 points. At home, Mrs. Hogget is stunned but proud. On the field, Farmer Hogget lets Babe know that he has done well.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

How does Mrs. Hogget feel about Babe competing in the Grand Challenge Trials?

At first she is surprised because Farmer Hogget had not told her that Babe is herding the sheep. When Babe is giving instructions to the sheep, Mrs. Hogget begins to feel that Babe's entry is a joke because it is taking so long for anything to happen. When Babe finally performs, however, Mrs. Hogget is amazed, proud, and overjoyed.

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Literary Analysis

What message does this story present about the significance of good manners?

This story shows that it is important to treat others with respect and consideration. Fly has much more experience at herding sheep than Babe does, but Babe quickly surpasses her because he is courteous and kind to the sheep. Fly herself has better results when she stops being rude and starts being polite to the sheep. Babe is even able to beat the sheepdogs at the trials because they all approach the sheep in the same rude manner that Fly originally had, whereas Babe wins them over by treating them with respect. Not only do Babe's manners make him a champion sheep herder, but they also keep him from being made into bacon.

Inferential Comprehension

What is the most likely reason that Ma is the only sheep that does not survive the attack of the sheep-worrying dogs?

Ma is very sick and old, and she also suffers from foot rot. These factors contribute to Ma's inability to run away from the dogs and her lack of strength to survive an attack. There is also the tendency of predators to seek out weak or sick animals, which probably makes Ma a primary target for them when they are looking for a specific sheep to attack.

Constructing Meaning

Fly has many conflicting ideas about Babe. Which are fact, and which are opinion?

Fly originally thinks that pigs are stupid, but she soon realizes that this was a false opinion and that Babe is actually quite intelligent. She is then of the opinion that Babe's interest in herding is merely an amusing diversion, but then she discovers that Babe is very good at it. Also, at first she thinks it is wrong for Babe to try to speak to the sheep, and this, too, turns out to be a misjudgment on her part. She is correct, however, in discerning that Babe's lack of speed will be a problem for him, particularly if he continues to overeat. She is also correct in assuming that sheep unfamiliar with Babe will be leery of him, and she is right that Babe possesses the ability to win the Grand Challenge Trials.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Babe has to learn how to be a sheep-pig in order to be accepted on the Hogget farm. Have the students watch a documentary about sheep dogs at work or do research so that they may gain some understanding of the difficulty of Babe's task. After the film, have the students discuss whether they believe a real pig could do what Babe does in this story.

Understanding the Author's Craft Farmer Hogget is not aware of a number of things that are happening on the farm. Have the students write a brief account of this story from Farmer Hogget's perspective to show how this story might be different if he were telling it.

Understanding Dialogue When Farmer Hogget returns home, Mrs. Hogget is probably going to have a lot to say about what she saw happen on the television. Have the students create a possible dialogue between the two. Have them pay attention to the difference in how the two characters speak in their dialogues.

Comparing and Contrasting Fly and Babe are two very different characters, but they also have some things in common. Have the students draw

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pictures of the two characters and list all the ways
they are similar and different.