



From Wild to Mild: A Dog in Two Worlds

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Discussion Guide PDF for Website

The major theme in this story: Search to find your true self and then be true to yourself, regardless of negative feedback from authorities, parents, peers, or anyone who wishes to control you by forcing you to do what you do not feel is right.

From Wild to Mild: A Dog in Two Worlds

Age Range: 8 - 14 years

Grade Level: 3 - 8

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The Story:

Eight-week-old Australian Shepherd Kaya is kidnapped from her backyard by a coyote who carries her to his den. She is meant to be food for the coyote's mate and puppies. The loving mother refuses to kill her and raises Kaya with her own pups. Kaya notices differences between herself and her family and becomes insecure about her worth to them. Kaya's coyote father bitterly resents her. He berates and criticizes her.

Two-year-old Kaya is trapped taken to a shelter where she remembers living with people as a puppy and adapts. Kaya is adopted by Laurie, a disabled woman who runs a sanctuary ranch for "special needs" and rejected animals. Kaya eagerly learns ranch work from Laurie, Manuel the Mexican helper, and old Jess, the collie.

She also finds her true talent: livestock herding and protecting. She is overjoyed to find her purpose in life and a family who needs and respects her abilities.

Kaya sees her coyote father steal an orphan lamb. Kaya's natural instincts are to protect, not kill. But she faces the dilemma of saving a prey animal from a predator.

How will Kaya save her lamb without fighting her father? Can she overcome her dogginess and win in a world of the wild?

The Challenges:

- Searching for your true nature is hard work and can be uncomfortable. What do you think are some of your natural talents?
- Finding your true self is a natural part of growing up. What can you do to discover your likes and dislikes? How will these things influence what kind of adult you may grow up to be?
- What does it mean to “be true to yourself?”
- Being true to yourself is often met with others' attempts to keep you under their own selfish control. Why might people try to hold you back from trying new things? When should you listen to others' advice?
- Becoming an insecure person can result when you are not able to conform to the expectations of others. What kind of failures have you experienced that have disappointed important people in your life? How did you feel? What did you do to remedy your emotional turmoil?
- Ultimately doing what you think is right for you is most important. What kind of challenges do you think you might face that will challenge your own feelings about what is right or wrong *for you*?

The Messages:

- Growing up requires your own search for yourself. What kind of person do you want to become?
- Discovering your true self takes time. How can you plan your search for who you want to be?
- Be true to yourself, regardless of push-back from others, although you must remain open to new ways of interpreting who you are as you evolve and grow. How will you know when to remain open to new experiences and when to choose to not go down certain paths?
- Evilness in others can be conquered with personal integrity. What is integrity? What forms of integrity do you already see in yourself?

The Lessons:

- Kindness can be found alongside cruelty. What kind of examples have you seen of this?
- Family can come in many forms. What varieties of families have you seen?
- Developing self-differentiation sometimes involves contradicting parents, authority figures, and peers. How do you respectfully disagree with others—especially when you feel what they are asking is not right for you?
- There are two sides (or more) of every story. How do you gather facts and then make decisions on what to believe?
- Analytical thinking can expose false facts. Is the term “false facts” the same as lying?
- Altruism defeats selfishness. What have you sacrificed for others? How did you feel when you put aside your own interests to help another?

What characteristics do you see in yourself that you might have in common with Kaya?