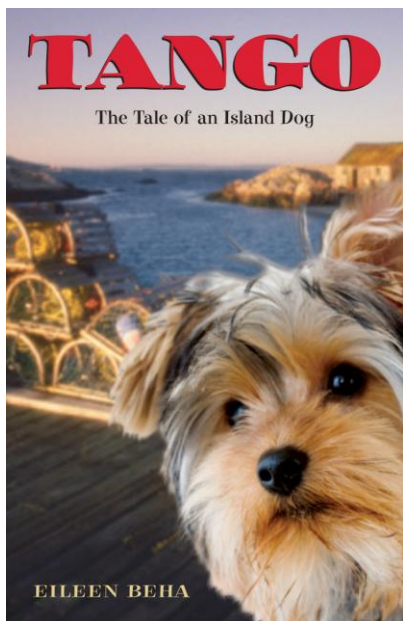


## TEACHERS' GUIDE

### *Tango: The Tale of an Island dog*



### **TANGO** *The Tale of an Island Dog*

**By Eileen Beha**

*A little dog with a brave heart . . . a story about hope . . . set amidst the beauty of Prince Edward Island.*

### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Tango is used to the good life. He has a silver heart charm for his dog collar, a luxurious doggy bed, a tiny tuxedo, and specially made booties for taking walks in Central Park. But disaster strikes when Tango's wealthy owners sail into stormy waters off the coast of Nova Scotia and the little Yorkshire terrier is swept overboard.

Tango washes up on the south shore of Prince Edward Island, tangled in a lobster trap. Barely alive, and looking like a drowned rat, Tango is taken home by a fisherman's widow named Augusta and nursed back to health. Augusta grows fond of the little dog but is reluctant to name him, believing that his owners will soon come looking for him.

Tango pines for Marcellina and the life he knew. As days turn into weeks, he despairs of getting back to Manhattan – unless he does something about it himself.

Carrying out his plan, Tango finds his path intertwining with a mysterious island fox named Beau, a runaway girl named McKenna Skye, and Nigel Stump, a three-legged cat fallen on hard times.

When Tango tries to retrieve his silver heart identification tag, a gang of feral cats and Malachi, a huge deformed rat, stand in his way. Events come to a head during a terrible storm where Tango's courage and loyalty are put to the test. But the greatest test of all comes when Tango must choose the place that his heart calls home.

## DISCUSSION POINTS:

### Before Reading:

1. Let the children look closely at the cover. Invite them to respond. Where might this story take place? Who is Tango? Does the expression on his face tell you anything about him?
2. Engage the class in a discussion about what it means to belong. Have students been in situations where they felt like they didn't belong?
3. Have the children scan the chapter titles for clues about the plot.
4. Read the *Prologue* aloud. On a map of North America, locate the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Search for a crescent-shaped island. What is the island's name?

### While Reading:

1. How does the Yorkshire terrier puppy feel about the name he is given by Marcellina? What vow does he make?
2. In Chapter 3, Marcellina and Tango are dancing at Diego's birthday party. Later, why might Tango remember this moment and long for it?
3. Tango despairs, questioning Marcellina's love for him (page 79). What do you think Marcellina and Diego did after Tango slipped into the sea?
4. Why is Augusta Smith reluctant to name the little dog that she's rescued?
5. What does 12-year-old McKenna Skye plan to do at the end of the summer? Are her plans realistic? What gives her hope?
6. Do you think that Augusta would befriend McKenna if Pup hadn't washed into her life? Why or why not?
7. Have you ever known a boy or girl who, like Nigel Stump, "falls in with the wrong crowd?" What does the gang of cats offer Nigel?
8. In what ways does the veterinarian, Jack Tucker, advance the plot?
9. Chapter 32—*Unlikely Heroes*—is a pivotal chapter in the book. What happens? In what ways do the relationships between the characters begin to change?
10. At the story's end, has Tango lived up to his vow to bring honor to his name? How do you know?

## VOCABULARY FOR DISCUSSION

Beginning with the words below, create a classroom space for a growing vocabulary list. Discuss the new words as they are added.

kindred (page 1)

identity (page 52)

devoid (83)

dilapidated (page 40)

festering (page 65)

improvised (page 120)

predator (page 48)

camaraderie (page 67)

silhouette (page 126)

## ESSAYS

1. Marcellina loses her precious pet when he washes overboard. Have you ever lost a pet you treasured? Write an essay about what happened to it, and to you, as a consequence. Draw or paint a picture of your pet.
2. This book is Tango's story, but the animals and humans who he encounters have their own stories, too. How did Tango change their lives? Is there a person in your life who has significantly changed you? Write about that person, in prose or poetry.
3. Doc Tucker, the veterinarian, tells McKenna on page 121, "The way I figure, the first step in getting what you want is naming it—knowing what it is you want in the first place." What does he mean? Do you agree, or disagree? Use experiences from your own life as examples.
4. In the *Epilogue* the reader discovers that Tango's mother, Sadie, and her son, Pierre, are in Marcellina and Diego's wedding party. Were you surprised? Write a new chapter describing how you think that this might have happened.

## ACTIVITIES

1. Given the author's descriptions, and your own imagination, recreate the village of Victoria-by-the-Sea, either two- or three-dimensionally.
2. Using the information provided on page 16, and a map of the northeastern United States and Maritime Provinces of Canada, trace the route that Marcellina and Diego took on their sailing trip. Mark the spot where Tango may have washed overboard.
3. Develop a script for Chapter 34—*A Fair Fight*—and act out the scene. Start the scene at the point that Beau hears a voice call into the night, "Hey, Rat-Boy!"
4. Working as a team, develop a set of questions that you would like to ask the author. With your teacher's permission, contact the author by email to arrange a real-life interview: [tango@eileenbeha.com](mailto:tango@eileenbeha.com)
5. Have each student choose a different character, major or minor, and draw his or her portrait. The cast of characters should include everyone from Tango to the Great Blue herons who help drag the infant McKenna to safety. Label each drawing with a paragraph describing the character and their relationship to Tango.

## RESEARCH PROJECTS

1. While *Tango* is a work of fiction, the information about Prince Edward Island is based on fact. Using at least three sources, research Prince Edward Island. Design a travel brochure that will encourage visitors to come to the island.
2. As a breed, Yorkshire terriers have an interesting history. Research this history and prepare an oral presentation for your class.
3. According to the author, the Yorkshire terrier that inspired *Tango* was born in a puppy mill in Oklahoma and sold in a pet shop in New Hampshire. Research the practice of breeding puppies in “puppy mills.” Citing statistics and other facts, prepare an argument that calls for responsible and humane dog breeding.
4. McKenna Skye has reasons to believe that she is a member of the Mi’kmaq, a First Nations people. Describe what you have learned about the Mi’kmaq by reading *Tango*. Expand your knowledge by researching the history and culture of the Mi’kmaq people in North America.
5. Like *Tango*, Beau Fox is a canine—a red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*). Learn more about this interesting animal. Use technology to share the information with your class.

## QUICK WRITE PROJECT

Read Chapter 43, *Rooted to the Red Earth*, aloud. With a quick write, have the children answer the following questions. The purpose is to get their ideas down on paper quickly, so it’s not a time to focus on punctuation, grammar, or spelling.

1. After his duel with Malachi, *Tango* is exhausted, but can’t sleep. Why?
2. What does *Tango* see inside the flickering light of the enchanted candle, and what about the image troubles him?
3. What things did *Tango* remember about his life in Manhattan that he didn’t like?
4. What comes to mind when he thinks about Augusta?
5. What comes to mind when he thinks about McKenna?
6. What comes to mind when he thinks about Beau Fox?
7. When *Tango* realizes that “he’s not a little dog anymore,” what does he mean?
8. What other animals are present in this chapter. What are they doing?
9. What does *Tango* do after he buries his heart-shaped identification tag?
10. If you were *Tango*, would you have stayed in Victoria-by-the-Sea with Augusta, or gone back to Marcellina in Manhattan. Why?

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