



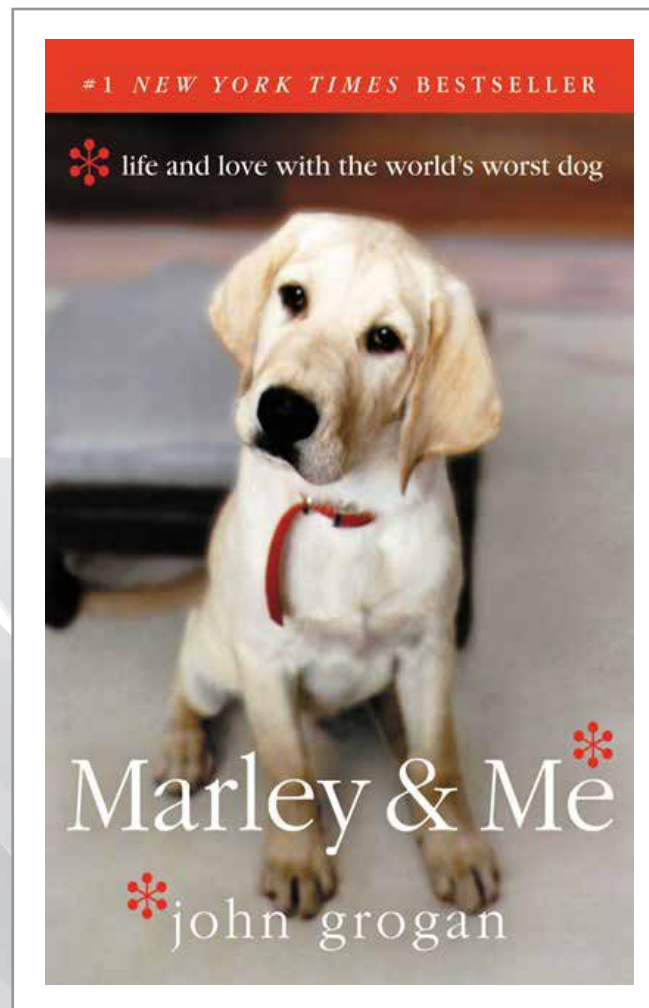
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Marley & Me: Life and Love with the World's Worst Dog**

John Grogan



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Marley & Me: Life and Love with the World's Worst Dog

John Grogan

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Analysis, research, evaluation,  
interpretation, compare/  
contrast, predicting

### Comprehension

Inference, sequencing

### Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,  
applications

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, reports, debate,  
interview, dramatic reading

### Writing

Essay, poetry, reviews

### Literary Elements

Point of view, setting, theme,  
genre, similes/metaphors,  
conflict/resolution

### Across the Curriculum

Art—research, painting,  
sculpture, photograph, quilt;  
Viewing—movie review; Social  
Studies—current events

**Genre:** nonfiction, biography/memoir

**Setting:** Michigan, Florida, Pennsylvania

**Point of View:** first person

**Themes:** tolerance, acceptance, unconditional love, commitment, trust, faithfulness, companionship, the ways in which pets enrich our lives, grief

**Style:** narrative nonfiction, literary journalism

**Tone:** humorous, heartwarming

**Date of First Publication:** 2005

## Summary

In this humorous and touching nonfiction narrative, John Grogan tells the story of life with “the world’s worst dog.” Marley, named for reggae artist Bob Marley, is a large, rambunctious, uncontrollable yellow Lab. He enters as a puppy into the lives of a young married couple, John and Jenny Grogan, as they assess their readiness to become parents. Marley immediately proves to be a handful, destroying household items, being kicked out of obedience school, and displaying a neurotic fear of thunderstorms. Through it all, the Grogans maintain a love for the dog. As the Grogans journey through their early married life, Marley is a constant presence—through the grief of a miscarriage and the joy and trials associated with the arrival of each of their three children. Marley accompanies them through two moves, one to Florida and one to Pennsylvania, wreaking havoc as he goes. Ultimately, age catches up with Marley, and the family learns firsthand about the brief nature of life and the need to savor each moment. When Marley dies, they must deal with the loss of this often troublesome but always lively, loyal, and trusting family member.

## About the Author

John Grogan is a journalist and nonfiction writer. He was born the youngest of four children in Detroit, Michigan in 1957. He began his career in journalism as a police reporter in St. Joseph, Michigan where he met and married fellow journalist Jenny. In 1985, Grogan took a break from reporting to pursue a Masters degree at Ohio State University. From there he went to work for *The South Florida Sun-Sentinel* in Fort Lauderdale, first as a reporter and ultimately as a columnist. After ten years, he left to take the position of editor in chief of *Organic Gardening* magazine. This change brought the family to their current home in Pennsylvania. Grogan missed the newspaper world, however, and left that job to become a columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. He published *Marley & Me* in 2005, and it was a huge hit, spending four months at the top of the *New York Times* Best Seller list. He has written two companion pieces, a children’s picture book entitled *Bad Dog, Marley!* and a young-adult version entitled *Marley: A Dog Like No Other*. In 2008 he published a memoir, *The Longest Trip Home*, which explores his childhood and his relationship with his father. Grogan continues to live in his home in the Pennsylvania countryside with his wife Jenny and their three children, Patrick, Conor, and Colleen. They also have a new yellow Lab named Gracie, the same breed as their beloved dog Marley.

Vocabulary
morphed
rambunctious
regimen
torpid
quipped
interloper
timbre
gentrified
inebriated
stoically
affable
voyeur

### Discussion Questions

1. Make a list of the many similes and metaphors John uses to describe Marley in Chapter 4. What picture of the puppy do they convey? (*Examples: body “as broad as a bulldozer” [p. 24], tail as “powerful as an otter’s” [p. 24], tail as a “weapon” and “swinging mallet,” movement as a “runaway locomotive” [pp. 25, 26]; temperament as “the attention span of algae” and “volatility of nitroglycerine” [p. 27]. Taken together, these descriptions show Marley is living up to the legacy of his father—that of a slightly crazed and wild force.*)
2. As Marley becomes a member of the family, what does he teach John about Jenny? (*Jenny displays a nurturing, patient, and protective side John has not witnessed before. She loves, plays with, and cares for Marley, and in times of potential crises she swoops in with a capable hand, be it pulling cellophane from his throat or rescuing him from the perils of fleas. Watching Jenny with Marley, all of John’s doubts regarding parenthood disappear.*)
3. What is the Grogans’ attitude toward having children? (*They talk about not trying but just allowing whatever happens to happen. Since adopting Marley, they feel more comfortable with the idea of a family; however, they are still secretly terrified they may have difficulty conceiving.*)
4. Chapter 5 is about the Grogans’ resolve to have a baby. With the focus away from the dog, what does John do to maintain Marley’s centrality to the story? (*John conveys Marley’s role as an important and ever-present family member even when he is not the focus. Marley rides with them to the drugstore. He is a witness to the pregnancy test, then a thief of the results.*)
5. John digresses a bit from Marley and the pregnancy to talk about the neighborhood they live in. What purpose, if any, does this digression serve? (*By telling the reader about his neighborhood, John provides motivation for future actions in the story. Crime is a main reason the young family later relocates. Criminal activity also explains why having a large dog turns out to be advantageous. The setting also characterizes John, as the city is the focus of his work as a reporter/columnist.*)
6. Marley seems to sense Jenny’s grief when she returns home after suffering a miscarriage. Do you believe the dog knew Jenny was sad? What experiences have you or others had with an animal seemingly understanding human emotion? (*Answers will vary.*)

### Supplementary Activities

1. Choose an animal or a person you know, and describe your subject using a series of similes and/or metaphors.
2. Using the Internet or the library, research incidents of animals responding to situations or human emotions in an unexpected way.

# Word Map

