

Marley & Me

John Grogan



Pearson English Readers 

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About the author

John Grogan was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1957. His parents were very religious so John went to the local Catholic school. He got his first writing job as a police reporter on a small local paper where he met his future wife, Jenny, also a reporter. His novel *Marley and Me* spent 76 weeks on the best seller list and was later made into a movie. The director actually used John and his wife as extras in a scene. He lives with his wife and their three children.

Summary

Chapters 1–2: John Grogan is a man who has loved dogs every since the time his father gave him a dog when he was a child. He and his wife, Jenny, both work on newspapers and live in Florida. One day he sees Jenny looking at an advert for a Labrador puppy. She is thinking that looking after a dog would be good preparation for looking after a baby, which they plan to have. They drive to the dog owner's house and choose a puppy that has taken an interest in them. They inquire about the father of the puppy, but the dog's owner seems reluctant to talk about him. They are told to return and collect the dog in three weeks. While they are driving away, they see a wild looking dog in the woods and John assumes that it must be the puppy's father. They decide to call the dog Marley, after the late Bob Marley, the reggae singer. While Jenny is on holiday with her sister, John brings Marley home. Marley is an excitable dog who loves company and chewing things. Jenny and John take him for walks on the beach, where they discover he is very difficult to control. However, he has a very loving heart as the couple discovers when they lose their unborn baby and Marley grieves with them.

Chapters 3–4: The couple decides to take Marley to a dog obedience class. Marley behaves very badly and the teacher puts this down to the owners not being strict enough with him, and not letting him know who was boss. At the second class the teacher tries to restrain Marley but fails. She tells John not to bring his dog to class again for a while, using the excuse that Marley is too young. The couple talks to their friend, Dr. Jay, who recommends that he neuter Marley, as this will calm him down. A week later, while they are driving to the doctors, Marley tries to jump out of the car and causes a traffic problem. He is later neutered and appears very relaxed after the operation. The couple decide they need a vacation and go to Ireland, leaving Marley at home in the care of Kathy, a colleague of John. When they return, they are met by an exhausted Kathy, who seems to be in a hurry to get away from the dog. Sometime later, Jenny has a baby boy, who they name Patrick. Marley loves the baby and is always at his side. They are a happy family and soon to be a bigger one, as Jenny announces she is pregnant again.

Chapters 5–6: One October night, John hears a girl's cry in the street. He goes outside, accompanied by Marley, and sees his neighbor's daughter covered in blood. She had been attacked by a man. The police arrive and take her to hospital. Luckily, she survives. Jenny's second pregnancy proves to be problematic and she has to stay in bed for a time. During this time, Marley stays with her. The baby is eventually born, a son called Conor. At first, everything appears fine. However, Jenny soon starts to behave strangely and then violently. John comes home from work one day to find Jenny beating Marley because he had broken several things in the house. Then, she says she doesn't want the dog anymore. John decides to try the obedience classes again, and with the help of a new teacher, Marley actually begins to behave. Jenny returns to normal and the family is happy again. When a friend of Jenny's, who works for a film company, asks if they could use Marley in a film they were making, the couple immediately agree. A couple of years later, the family watch the film and their famous dog Marley's small part in it. The family decides to move to a better neighborhood and buy a house in the up market town of Boca Raton.

Chapters 7–8: One day, the couple decides to go for drinks at a roadside restaurant. They tie Marley to the heavy table, but he sees another dog across the street and drags the table across the road. Jenny and John retrieve the table to the astonishment of the other customers. Jenny has another baby, a girl called Colleen. On John's

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fortieth birthday, everyone is feeling tired and they don't celebrate it. John is a bit sad about this and meets up for a drink in a bar with a friend. The barman announces that a Mr. John Grogan is wanted on the phone. It is Jenny calling to say the baby was crying and could he come home immediately. John arrives home to discover a surprise party has been put on for him. One day, Marley draws attention to himself again when he drinks a lot of seawater, gets ill and poops all over the beach. John swears that is the last time he will ever take Marley to the beach. John gets a new job and the family relocates to a house in the countryside near Pennsylvania. They love their new house and Marley especially loves the countryside and the snow. Marley is now nine years old and John notices that he is moving much more slowly and also he suspects that Marley is going deaf.

Chapters 9–10: Marley is now twelve years old and showing his age. The couple has a fright one night when Marley disappears whilst John is taking him for a walk on a cold and wet night. They find him eventually and bring him inside. Marley starts to deteriorate quickly: his fur falls out, he starts losing his sight and his hips are causing him pain. When John gets a new and more demanding job and Jenny goes to visit her sister, they put Marley in a dog home. A short time later, someone calls John from the dog's home and tells him Marley is very sick and they might need to think about putting him down. John calls his wife and they agree to do this. However, Marley makes a partial recovery and John collects him from the home. He can't move at all well and one time he falls down the stairs. John realizes that it will soon be time for Marley to die. One day, Jenny can't pick up Marley to get him into the house, so John takes Marley to the animal doctors. There is nothing they can do. John lies down with his dog and says goodbye before the doctor gives Marley something and he dies quietly. John takes the body home and Marley is buried under two fruit trees. John remembers the times with Marley. He knows Marley wasn't a good dog sometimes, nor that intelligent, but he and the family had loved him and Marley had loved them. One day, Jenny sees an advert for a big, slightly wild, Labrador, very similar to Marley. She and John think about it for a short time and decide it wouldn't do any harm to go and see the dog.

Background and themes

Tolerance: Marley has many faults, but the family tolerates him because he has the great gift of unconditional love. The message is made that no matter how bad an animal is, or a person for that matter, we must always look for the good in them.

Triumph over adversity: Jenny has one awful experience when she loses her first baby, supposedly through contamination by strong chemicals. Her second pregnancy is also problematic because the baby is too small. However, she never loses hope and eventually has three healthy children.

Aging: Marley is of course a dog, but his passage through life is similar to that of a man or woman.

The boundless energy of youth gives way to middle age and then old age, with its accompanying physical deterioration and finally death.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Put the students in small groups and then write the following book titles on the board: *The Incredible Journey*, *The Horse Whisperer* and *The Red Pony*. Then ask the students to think of as many animal books they can and to discuss the following questions: *Which animal book do you like the best and why? Which is the nicest animal you know from a book and which is the most dangerous? Do you think animal books are funny? Do you think animal books are only for children?*

Chapters 1–2

While reading (page 3, after 'We heard a song by Bob Marley ... Jenny and I liked his music, too.')

- Discuss:** Ask the students to think of all the kinds of music styles they know in English and put their suggestions on the board and add some of your own. Put the students in pairs and ask them to discuss the following questions about music: *What kind of music do you like / hate? Do you like to dance to music? Is music very important at a party? Do you listen to music when you study?*

After reading

- Write and guess:** Write *When I was twelve years old, my father gave me my first dog.* on the board. Elicit which word is wrong from the students (ten not twelve). Now students choose a sentence from Chapters 1–2 and rewrite it changing one word. Students move around the classroom reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

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Chapters 3–4

While reading (page 13, after 'Jenny and I had a wonderful vacation in Ireland.')

- 4 Write:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to write a letter to Kathy about their holiday in Ireland. Ask them to invent details of what they did during the day and at night, the people they met, the weather, the food, and the sights they visited.

After reading

- 5 Pair work:** Write the following words on the board: *flowers, young, paws, tickets, warm, machine, pens, shine*. Ask the students to talk and write in pairs to say how these words were used in Chapters 3–4.

Chapters 5–6

While reading (page 21, at the end of Ch 5.)

- 6 Game:** Put the students in groups of three and tell them there are fifteen words in Chapter 5 that can be used to describe how a person is feeling. Tell them they have to find the words as quick as they can. The group that finishes first, wins.

(page 23, after 'They had expensive cars, big houses, and beautiful clothes.')

- 7 Discuss:** Put the students in groups and ask them to discuss the following questions about money: *Is money important to you? Do you think a lot of money makes people happy? Do you think some people marry for money? How much money do you spend every week and what do you spend it on?*

After reading

- 9 Write and guess:** Put students in pairs and ask them to choose a short paragraph from Chapters 5–6. Tell them to write it again, making five changes to words in the text. Students then read out their paragraphs to the other students, who have to identify the mistakes.

Chapters 7–8

While reading (page 26, after 'When Colleen was two months old, I had my fortieth birthday.')

- 10 Role play:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to act out a conversation between John and Jenny. They are going to plan John's birthday party. Ask them to consider the following questions: *What food and drink will they have? Who will they invite? What music will they have? Will they have the party in their house or in a restaurant?* See discussion key for an example start to the conversation.

After reading

- 11 Write:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to write a summary of Chapters 7–8. Tell them the summary must be exactly fifty words, not one more or one less. The students then read out their summaries to each other.

Chapters 9–10

Before reading

12 Predict: Put the students in pairs and ask them to predict the answers to the following questions:

- 1 Marley goes into the woods and a) kills a small animal b) is lost and never comes back c) John finds him.
- 2 Marley has a problem with his a) stomach b) mouth c) tail.
- 3 Marley a) has a car accident b) falls down the stairs c) has a fight with another dog.
- 4 Marley dies a) in the car b) in the animal hospital c) in John's house.
- 5 John and Jenny a) never want another dog b) go and look at another dog c) get a cat.

While reading (page 33, after 'Some days later, an animal doctor called me from the home.')

- 13 Game:** Ask the students to write down all the professions they know in English. Put their suggestions on the board and add some of your own. Put them in groups of four and tell them they are now going to play the twenty questions game. Student A thinks of a profession. The other students have to ask Student A questions to try and guess the profession. Student A can only respond Yes, No and Sometimes. The group can ask up to twenty questions. If they can't guess correctly, Student A wins.

After reading

- 14 Quiz:** Put the students in groups and ask them to make a list of all the characters, humans and animals, which appear in the book. Then ask them to write down the answers to the following questions:
- 1 Who wanted to sell some puppies?
 - 2 Who gave Marley fleas?
 - 3 Who wanted Marley to leave the obedience class?
 - 4 Who neutered Marley?
 - 5 Who wanted to leave John's house quickly?
 - 6 What was the name of Jenny's first son?
 - 7 What was the name of the daughter of John's neighbor?
 - 8 Who was the boss of the film company?
 - 9 Who pooped in the ocean?
 - 10 Who went for a drink in a bar with John?

- 15 Discuss:** Put the students in groups to discuss the following questions about the book: *Did you like the book? Did you think the end was sad? Would you like to have a dog like Marley? Did you think John and Jenny were good to Marley?*