

The Stray Dog

I wonder what he finds to eat
in smelly garbage heaps.
When the night is cold like this
I wonder where he sleeps.
I wonder why he crouches down
and trembles while he's chewing.
Do people shout and chase him
when they see what he is doing?
This morning when he snatched the half
of sandwich that I threw
I know I saw him give his stumpy tail
a wag or two.
I wonder if he might begin
to trust someone who's kind.
I wonder, when she sees he's thin,
if Mom might change her mind.

– By Alice Schertle

Responding to the Poem





The Stray Dog

Alice Schertle

Monday: Introduce the Poem (big book page 20)

The Heart of the Poem

In this poem by Alice Schertle, the speaker is wondering about a stray dog she or he knows. She repeats the words “I wonder” several times. The speaker’s wonderings give us a clear picture of what the stray dog’s life is like. As you listen to the poem, think about what the speaker in the poem is wondering about the stray dog.

Conversations About the Poem

What does the speaker in this poem wonder about the stray dog? Turn to the person next to you and share what you remember. Has anybody ever seen a stray dog on the street or in your neighborhood? What are some things you remember about the dog?

Tuesday: Ways to Climb Inside the Poem

Acting and Choral Reading

Divide the class into two groups. Group 1 will repeat the words “I wonder” as you point to those words in the poem, and Group 2 will act out the actions of the stray dog. You can read the rest of the line after “I wonder . . .” as Group 2 acts out the actions of the dog. For example, in lines 1 and 2, the first group will say the words, “I wonder,” and while you read the rest of the lines, the second group will be acting out the actions of the dog. You might talk about ways that they can act out the last two lines using hand movements or other actions.

Wednesday: Ways to Climb Inside the Poem

Shared Writing

This poem might be called a list poem because it is essentially a list of the poet’s wonderings about a stray dog. List poems provide a wonderful structure for shared writing experiences. Using the repeating phrase “I wonder,” write your own list poem as a class. To save time, you may want to choose a topic that all students will be able to relate to (for example, a tree in the school’s playground, a fire truck seen on a recent class trip to the firehouse, or something that relates to your particular curriculum). Using the repeating phrase “I wonder,” build a poem together.

Thursday: Poet's Talk

The poet Alice Schertle says that she gets ideas for poems from

“images, sounds, feelings . . . a traffic jam, the taste of pizza, sand in my shoe. . . .”

The best inspiration of all, I think, is an SSN, a Sudden Strange Notion.”

A notion is a thought or an idea, and Alice Schertle calls it an SSN, a Sudden Strange Notion. I'm thinking of this idea about an SSN and her poem “The Stray Dog,” and I'm wondering if maybe she saw a stray dog on a street and got an SSN and decided to write a poem. Has anyone here ever gotten an SSN to write something?

Friday: Craft Talk

- ⊙ This poem is essentially a **list poem**—a simple, kid-friendly form that in this case uses the repeating phrase “I wonder.” List poems can be built around various repeating phrases—“I like . . .,” “I wish . . .,” and so on. Even very beginning writers often feel successful when encouraged to use this simple structure.
- ⊙ The **repetition** of the phrase “I wonder” builds on the rhythm of the poem. Repeating a line or a phrase helps children discover how to create rhythm in their own poetry.