Celebrate the unbeatable combination of kids and dogs with this fun theme, sure to appeal to young readers who love “man’s best friend.”

**Setting the Scene**

**Doghouse Reading Room for One.** Create a doghouse by cutting an arched front door on one side of a large cardboard box. For easy visual control and maneuvering, cut the opposite side of the box the same way to make a rear door as well. Paint the box. Add a “Fido” sign over the door, and use more cardboard to make an angled roof with cardboard shingles. Inside, place a large cushioned fabric dog bed for a small reader to curl up in. On a wall nearby, display a “Fetch a Good Book!” poster. A large dog dish just outside the door, filled with a few well-chosen board books, completes the effect.

**Bulletin Board.** Use “Fetch a Good Book!” posters and progress tracker pieces to create a theme bulletin board. You might assemble one or several progress tracker dogs, expanding their bodies with colorful sections bearing the names of participants in the theme programs. Or you might make a border of bones, dog dishes, and books around the edge of the bulletin board and use the middle to feature details about upcoming programs or covers of favorite books about dogs.

**Book Display.** Use a bookshelf or tabletop, perhaps under the bulletin board, to display fiction and nonfiction books, as well as DVDs and audio books, about dogs. Add a small dog bed, and fill it with miniature plush or beanbag toy dogs. Or set out a dog’s feeding dish stocked with markers and cutouts of bones (see page 9) on which children can write and then post book recommendations for other young readers.

**Dalmatian Dots Display.** Make a large cardboard cutout of a Dalmatian (see the patterns on page 10), painted white, with just the face drawn on. Fold a cardboard support to stand it up on a table or in a corner. Set out black circles and white crayons. Kids can write book recommendations on the circles and add them as spots on the Dalmatian.

**Incentives.** In addition to the “Fetch a Good Book!” theme bookmarks and book bags, stock up on inexpensive novelties like dog bone–shaped crayons and paw print stamps or party balloons, available from www.amazon.com; or dog finger puppets, stickers, or mini plush animals, available from www.orientaltrading.com. For a special take-home project, make “doggie bags” (from small paper bags with dog face cutouts glued on them) that are filled with bookmarks, dog bone crayons, and other small prizes.

**Games/Contests**

**Red Rover.** You’ll need a large meeting room or yard to play this classic game in which two teams take turns
chanting the “Red Rover” rhyme. One team recites the rhyme to call a member of the other team to run at and break through their team's hand- or arm-linked chain. Children who break through the chain get to take an opponent back to strengthen their team; children who don't must join the opposing team.

**Musical Dog Beds.** In this version of musical chairs, kids vie for space in a circle of large dog beds on the floor, all to the tune of doggie songs like “Bingo” or “Who Let the Dogs Out?”

**Barking Contests.** Try these ideas:

- Invite kids to compete with their very best dog bark, howl, or whine. Judge the sounds and award prizes in categories like saddest, scariest, friendliest, and so on.
- Have kids bark, howl, or whine to convey different canine messages (“Let’s play,” “I’m loney,” “I’m hungry,” “I sense danger,” and so on), and try to guess what each “dog” is trying to say. Or, play the dog barks at [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/meaning-dog-barks.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/meaning-dog-barks.html) and have kids guess what each bark means.


**Arts/Crafts**

**Paper Bag Dog Puppets.** Use the instructions at [www.dltk-kids.com/animals/mbagdog.htm](http://www.dltk-kids.com/animals/mbagdog.htm) as the starting point for making dog puppets from paper bags, paper cutouts, crayons, scissors, and glue. Then branch out to make different breeds—fictional or “original” canine critters—using different colors and shapes.

**Dog Park Mobiles.** Create fun dog-themed mobiles. The following mobile is designed for very young children, but it can be adapted for greater challenge for older kids.

**Here’s what you need (per mobile):**

- Patterns on pages 10–11
- One cardboard tube (from a roll of paper towels or 1/3 of a cardboard tube from a roll of wrapping paper)
- Paint, markers, stickers, etc.
- Yarn or string (7-8’)
- 1 sheet white or tan card stock
- Double-faced tape or glue
- Stapler and staples
- Colored felt and small craft items for decorating (for older children)

**Here’s what you do:**

- Copy the template sign and dog shapes on pages 10–11 onto card stock.
- Decorate the tubes with paint, markers, stickers, etc.
- Run a 2 ½’ length of yarn through the tube, and tie the ends together to make a hanger.
- Cut out the “Dog Park” sign and the dog shapes, and decorate them.
- Tape or glue the sign to the front of the tube.
- Cut the remaining yarn into five pieces of different lengths. Tie one end of each length around the tube, spacing them out along its length.
- Staple a dog to each string.

For older children, provide the dog shapes on the templates, but have children cut them out and trace them onto felt instead of card stock, or draw and cut their own felt dogs. Decorate them with glue-on pom-poms, beads, craft gems, etc., and add them to the mobile.

**Origami Dogs.** Have fun with paper folding. Visit [www.origami-instructions.com/origami-dog-face.html](http://www.origami-instructions.com/origami-dog-face.html) for instructions to make both a dog head and a body to put it on. Make just the head with younger children; add the body with older ones.
Snacks/Recipes

Puppy Chow. This sweet, crunchy treat that looks like kibble can’t be beat! Melt ½ cup of butter, 1 cup of peanut butter, and a 12-ounce package of chocolate chips, and stir until smooth. Place a 12-ounce box of Crispix® or Chex® cereal in a bowl. Pour the melted mixture over the cereal, and stir to coat thoroughly. Then pour the coated cereal into a large plastic bag, add 2 ½ cups of powdered sugar, and gently shake the bag until the powdered sugar covers the cereal. Makes 24 small servings.

Scooby Snacks. Keebler® makes Scooby Doo™ Baked Graham Cracker Sticks, shaped like dog bones—perfect for this theme!

Canine Cookies. Make sugar cookies shaped like dogs, doghouses, or fire hydrants; shape ginger cookies like dogs or dog bones; or decorate round cookies with chocolate chips or bits of frosting to look like puppy paws.

Puppy Pops. Some bakeries sell puppy pops on sticks, which are made of either little cake balls or doughnut holes decorated with puppy ears and faces. You can also get dog head lollipops in different flavors through www.amazon.com.

Writing Projects

A Dog’s Life. Read Dear Mrs. LaRue or one of the companion books about Ike. Point out and discuss how the illustrations show the contrast between what Ike experiences in his imagination (in gray tones) and the reality (in color). Talk about dogs the children know, and what the children might imagine their lives to be like. Have the children write journal entries about a dog, detailing the events of a day from the dog’s point of view. The entries might be serious or funny, realistic or wildly imaginative. Invite them to illustrate their journal entries, and display the results.

Help Me, Mr. Mutt! Read the book by that title, and invite kids to imagine themselves as dogs. They will write letters to Mr. Mutt, describing their problems and asking for advice. You, or the group as a whole, will try to answer the letters as Mr. Mutt.

The Perfect Dog for Me. Have kids practice descriptive writing with an essay titled “The Perfect Dog for Me.” They may describe their current pet, or some ideal canine creature that exists only in their imaginations. Encourage lots of detail about how the dog looks, acts, smells, feels to the touch, etc. Encourage illustrations to go with the essays. A visit to Animal Planet’s “Dog Breed Selector,” at www.animalplanet.com/breed-selector/dog-breeds.html, is good preparation.

Adventures with a Dog. Have children read stories about kids having adventures with dogs, and then imagine such adventures for themselves and their dogs. They will create comic strips (of six to eight frames) that share their adventures.

“Puttin’ on the Dog.” Post some well-known idioms or adages involving dogs. Invite kids to find more. Then have them choose a saying and write about what it means, where it came from, and how it relates to their lives. Here are a few to get you started: “It’s raining cats and dogs,” “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” feeling “sick as a dog,” “fighting like cats and dogs,” “the dog days of summer,” “let sleeping dogs lie,” leading “a dog’s life,” you’re “in the dog house,” “putting on the dog,” you’ve “gone to the dogs,” “top dog,” “dog is man’s best friend,” “underdog,” and “his bark is worse than his bite.”

Special Events

“Man’s Best Friend” Movie Night. Arrange a showing of one or more family feature films about the relationships between people and dogs.

Marley & Me (directed by David Frankel, Twentieth Century Fox, 2009, DVD, ASIN B001REZM6K)

Because of Winn-Dixie (directed by Wayne Wang, Twentieth Century Fox, 2005, DVD, ASIN B0009NZ2KG)

Lady and the Tramp (Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2012, DVD, ASIN B0061QD88S)
Fetch a Good Book Activity Guide

101 Dalmatians (directed by Stephen Herek, Walt Disney Video, 2008, DVD, ASIN B001B1T7BU)

Hotel for Dogs (directed by Thor Freudenthal, Paramount, 2009, DVD, ASIN B001UJIMFU)

Reader’s Theater. Find several books or poems about dogs that are suitable for reader's theater performances, and help children prepare and present them as individuals or small groups. Use minimal props and costumes when they add to the effect. Rely on expressive reading. Here are some suggestions:

• “Three,” “Darla,” or “Tillie and Maude” from Once I Ate a Pie
• Dear Mrs. LaRue (with a narrator, one or several children as Ike, and someone showing the pictures)
• Diary entries from Dog Diaries: Secret Writings of the WOOF Society
• Chapters from Down Girl and Sit: Smarter than Squirrels


Be Kind to Dogs Day. Invite a local veterinarian or animal shelter staff person to present a program on responsible pet care, pet safety, dog adoption, and spaying and neutering. May I Pet Your Dog? is a good accompaniment to this program, helping kids learn how to safely approach and meet dogs they don’t know.

Fetch! Send individual children or small teams on a hunt around the library to learn about dogs and, at the same time, get familiar with your collection and practice library skills. You can customize this hunt to your collection, using the “Fetch a Good Book Task List” at the end of this guide. Make one copy of the task list for each child or team. (Cover any tasks that do not work for your collection before copying.) Have children find as many as they can by following the clues. They will turn in their sheets, perhaps for a small prize for each completed sheet.

Balloon Dogs. To enhance any themed program, invite a volunteer or two to make balloon dogs for kids to take home and teach them to make their own.

Math/Science Activities

Dog Years. Help kids figure out their ages and the ages of family members in dog years, or their dogs’ ages in human years. The common formula of equating one human year to seven dog years is misleading, because dogs reach maturity quickly and age faster than we do. There’s an online calculator that converts human years to dog years, and vice versa, more accurately, at www.onlineconversion.com/dogyears.htm.

Henry the Fourth. Read the book by that name, and use the story and suggested activities to explore the concept of ordinal numbers with young children.

Canine Charts and Graphs. Read Help Me, Mr. Mutt!, paying attention to the graphs and charts Mr. Mutt includes in his letters of advice. Create several different kinds of graphs and charts showing aspects of dogs’ lives, like growth, feeding schedules, use of time in a day, and so on. Start with variations of the graphs and charts in the book to reflect your silly or serious responses to the problems posed. Then try some original ones. If you use the Help Me, Mr. Mutt! writing prompt on page 3, create graphs or charts to go with your responses. Along the way, explore what forms of graphic representations work best to convey different kinds of information.

Space Adventures with Max the Dog. Read the story (without the sidebars) Max Goes to the Space Station or other titles in the Science Adventures with Max the Dog series. Point out that the stories are science fiction because they are set in the future and use ideas and technology that we don’t yet have. Then go back through the sidebars, exploring together accurate scientific information about the subjects of the books.
Extend the activity by having children draw fanciful illustrations of Max in his space suit exploring other astronomical destinations, and perhaps writing stories to go with them.

Life Cycle. Use Seymour Simon’s *Dogs* and other resources to explore the life cycle of *Canis lupus familiaris* (the domestic dog), from puppy to adolescent to adult to senior. There’s a printable coloring page of the cycle at [www.education.com/worksheet/article/color-life-cycle-8](http://www.education.com/worksheet/article/color-life-cycle-8).

**Internet Activities**

**Best Friends.** Bookmark the video clip titled “Best Friends” for a quick, heartwarming chuckle as a large dog waits patiently while his toddler “walker” plays in a puddle. The clip can be found at [www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/10/dog-waits-while-toddler-splashes-puddle_n_2270197.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/10/dog-waits-while-toddler-splashes-puddle_n_2270197.html) and is also available on YouTube.


**Online Dog Games.** For a wide selection of online games with dog characters and themes for young children, visit [www.pbskids.org/games/dogs.html](http://www.pbskids.org/games/dogs.html).

**Fetch a Good Book Resources**


• *Max Goes to the Space Station: A Science Adventure with Max the Dog*, by Jeffrey Bennett. Big Kid Science, 2013. ISBN 1937548287. 3-5. Also see other series titles


Customize your own task list using a combination of these tasks and your own.

1. Find a movie about dogs in the library’s DVD collection. Write the title of the movie here:

2. What Dewey Decimal Classification number takes you to information on pet care? _____ Go to that number in the children’s nonfiction section of the library. Write the title and author of a book on that subject here:

3. Find a board book about dogs or puppies. Write the title and author of the book here:

4. Look for a representation of a dog somewhere in the library. It might be a puppet, on a poster, or decorating the children’s room. Write here what you found and where:

5. Find a beginning reader book about dogs or puppies. Write the title and author of the book here:

6. Go to the library’s collection of recorded music. Find a CD with a song about dogs or puppies. Write the name of the song and the name of the CD here:

7. Find a jigsaw puzzle of a dog picture set out somewhere in the library. Add a piece to the puzzle, and write where you found it here:
8. Go to the collection of magazines for adults. Find a magazine that shows a dog on the cover. Write the title of the magazine and the date of that issue here:

9. Find a book of children’s fiction about a dog. Write the title and author of the book here:


11. Find a display of bookmarks with a dog on them. Take a bookmark.

12. Go to a computer station, and find a website about different breeds of dogs. Write the name of the website and its URL (web address) here:

13. What Dewey Decimal Classification number takes you to information about the domestic dog’s close relative, the wolf? _____ Go to that number in the children’s nonfiction section of the library. Write the title and author of a book on that subject here:

14. What Dewey Decimal Classification number takes you to information on craft projects related to dogs? _____ Go to that number in the children’s nonfiction section of the library. Write the name of the craft project and the title and author of a book on that subject here: