

## Teacher's Guide

### Pack of Hearts

by Danette Vigilante

**Suggested Grades:** 2–4

**Reading Level:** Early chapter book

**Themes:** empathy, courage, belonging, teamwork

**Estimated Lesson Time:** 20–30 minutes

---

### About the Book

*Pack of Hearts* is an illustrated early chapter book inspired by a true story.

Slick is a thoughtful junkyard dog who believes that looking out for others matters, even when life is hard. When Luna, a gentle poodle from the neighborhood, becomes separated from her mom, Slick refuses to stand back and hope for the best.

Instead, he gathers a small group of unlikely characters and sets out to help her find her way home. Along the way, the pack learns that courage does not always look loud or fearless. Sometimes it simply means choosing to care.

---

### Before Reading

Ask students:

- What does the word **pack** mean?
- Why might animals form a pack?
- Why might people need one too?

### Quick class discussion:

Ask students to think about a time when someone helped them or stood up for them. Invite a few volunteers to share.

Explain that the characters in the story will discover that helping others can sometimes be the bravest choice.

## Discussion Questions

### Understanding the Story

1. What kind of dog is Slick? What makes him different from some of the other dogs?
2. Why does Slick decide to help Luna?
3. What challenges does the pack face during their journey?
4. Which character surprised you the most?

### Thinking Deeper

5. What does it mean to belong?
6. Why can it sometimes be difficult to help someone else?
7. What does each member of the pack contribute to the group?

### Personal Reflection

8. Have you ever helped someone who needed support?
9. Have you ever needed help from someone else?

---

### Activity: Design Your Own Pack

Every pack needs members who bring different strengths.

Ask students to create their own pack.

Students should include:

- a name for their pack
- three to five members
- a special strength or trait for each member
- one way their pack helps others

Students may draw their pack and share their ideas with the class.

## Character Traits Activity

Think about the characters in *Pack of Hearts*. Each member of the pack has a strength that helps the group. What are the strengths of each character and how do they help the pack?

Slick: \_\_\_\_\_

Luna: \_\_\_\_\_

Athena: \_\_\_\_\_

Link: \_\_\_\_\_

Goodboy: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Discussion follow up:**

- Which character would you want on your team?
  - Which character do you relate to most?
- 

### **Writing Prompt: If I Were in the Pack**

Imagine you joined Slick's pack.

Write a short paragraph describing:

- your special strength
- how you would help the group
- a challenge you would help solve

Students may also draw themselves as part of the pack.

---

### **Closing Reflection**

Ask students to think quietly for a moment.

“Sometimes people feel left out or alone. What is one small thing you could do to help someone feel like they belong?”

Invite a few students to share their ideas.

Remind the class that small acts of kindness can make a big difference.

---

### **About the Author**

Danette Vigilante grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and continues to call New York City home. She writes stories for young readers that explore empathy, courage, and the ways small acts of kindness can make a difference.

*Pack of Hearts* was inspired by a real story about a dog named Scout who escaped from a nearby animal shelter again and again to return to a nursing home. Somehow, he knew he belonged there.

The connection he formed with the residents was something special, and it stayed with me long after I read about it.

This story is about what can happen when we choose to care, even when it's not easy, and how sometimes the smallest acts can help someone feel like they belong.

**Ask students to think about someone around them. Is there a small way they could help that person feel like they belong?**