PUMA: Shelter Dog Becomes a Hero

A Christian Educator's Guide

For elementary and middle school classrooms | Grades 3–6

Five literature-and-Bible lessons • Student worksheets • Assessments • Service learning

Designed for classrooms where each student and teacher has a copy of the novel.

Teacher introduction & unit at a glance

Biblical principles are explored through human choices and responses based on the fictional perspective of the dog Puma, who serves simply as a storyteller.

Instructional setup

- Audience: Grades 3–6
- Modules: Five 40–45 minute lessons after students have read the book. Relevant chapters for each topic are provided.
- Materials: One novel and Bible per student, notebooks, pencils, sticky notes, and optional art materials.
- Have students read the entire novel.
- Before each lesson: Assign the story event and ask students to be prepared to discuss concepts as outlined in the teaching sequence.

Common Core State Standards, Grades 3–6

- Reading Comprehension: Students support their answers with evidence from the book.
- Theme: Students identify and explain the story's central messages.
- Character Development: Students examine how Puma responds to challenges and changes throughout the story.
- Point of View: Students explore how telling the story through Puma's eyes influences the reader's understanding, and helps apply concepts to their lives.

Five-lesson sequence

1. Created for a purpose. God gives each person worth and purpose.
2. Learning through challenges. Perseverance and spiritual growth.
3. Love your neighbor. Serving others through love.
4. Kindness changes lives. Compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance.
5. Courage in difficult times. Faith, trust, and courage.

Lesson 1. Created for a Purpose

Theme: Created for a purpose. God created us with worth and for a purpose.

Scripture Connections/Options

- Ephesians 2:10 – We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God prepared for us.
- Ephesians 1:11 – God works all things according to His plan and purpose.
- Romans 8:28 – God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.
- Psalm 139:13 – You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 2 Timothy 1:9 – God saved us and called us to a holy calling.

Focus: Character traits and motivation

Reading Assignment: Puma's early shelter experiences and her search for a permanent home (Chapters 2, 8, 11, and 20).

Objectives

- Interpret a specific event from the reading that demonstrates purpose and worth.
- Using a selected Bible verse, describe how Puma's experiences help students understand their own purpose and God-given worth.
- Identify a realistic action that demonstrates how to apply these ideas to daily life.

Teaching Sequence (45 Minutes)

5 min — Ask students to share how Puma's experiences helped them understand purpose and worth.

10 min — Have students identify at least two ways Puma discovered her purpose and worth.

10 min — Discuss the text: What did Puma think about her place in the world? How did those caring for Puma influence her feelings about her purpose and worth?

8 min — Scripture connection: How does God's love show us that we have worth? How is God's love different from earning approval from others or through our achievements?

10 min — Have students write a statement describing Puma's feelings about her worth and what helped her discover her value and purpose.

2 min — Have students discuss one practical way to apply what they learned.

Lesson 2. Perseverance After Setbacks

Theme: Learning through challenges. Perseverance (determination and grit) and growth.

Scripture Connections/Options

- Galatians 6:9 – Do not grow weary in doing good.
- Isaiah 40:31 – Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
- Philippians 4:13 – We can face challenges through Christ, who gives us strength.
- Joshua 1:9 – Be strong and courageous. The Lord will be with you wherever you go.

Focus: Sequence, cause and effect, character development

Reading Assignment: Puma's experience of being struck by lightning, her first unsuccessful basic obedience class, and her later successful training (Chapters 4, 14, 15, and 16).

Objectives

- Interpret a specific event from the reading that demonstrates challenges, perseverance, and growth.
- Using a selected Bible verse, describe how Puma's experiences help students understand how to face challenges.
- Identify a realistic action that demonstrates how to apply these ideas to daily life.

Teaching Sequence (45 Minutes)

5 min — Ask students to share what they learned from Puma's challenges.

10 min — Have students identify at least two challenges Puma faced and explain how she moved forward.

10 min — Discuss the text: What happened to Puma after she was struck by lightning? What made her training difficult? What changed between her first obedience class and the next?

8 min — Scripture connection: What does perseverance mean? How can perseverance develop a person's character? Why does struggling with something not mean a person has less value?

10 min — Have students create a two-column "Challenge / Response" chart and write a short reflection using their notes.

2 min — Have students discuss one practical way to apply what they learned.

Lesson 3. Love Your Neighbor

Theme: Loving your neighbor. Serving others through love.

Scripture Connections

- 1 Peter 4:10 – Use the gifts God gives us to serve others.
- Mark 10:45 – Even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.
- 1 Corinthians 12:7 – The manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.
- Matthew 20:28 – The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.
- 1 Corinthians 4:1 – We are to be regarded as servants of Christ.

Focus: Central idea, supporting details, real-world connections

Reading Assignment: Puma's visits and the PAWSitivity deliveries supporting older adults and their pets (Chapters 12, 13, 18, 19, and 22).

Objectives

- Interpret a specific event from the reading that demonstrates loving and serving others.
- Using a selected Bible verse, describe how Puma's actions help students understand the importance of loving and serving others.
- Identify a realistic action that demonstrates how to apply these ideas to daily life.

Teaching Sequence (45 Minutes)

5 min — Ask students to share what they learned about helping others.

10 min — Ask students to identify at least two ways Puma showed love and served others.

10 min — Discuss the text: How did Puma serve her friends? What needs did the community recognize? How did Captain Mike, Miss Kim, volunteers, and others respond?

8 min — Scripture connection: How can Christians use their gifts to love and serve others?

10 min — Have students find three details from the story that show how teamwork made a difference. Ask them to propose one service idea their school or classroom could put into practice.

2 min — Have students discuss one practical way to apply what they learned.

Lesson 4. Compassion and Acceptance

Theme: Kindness changes lives. Compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance.

Scripture Connections/Options

- Ephesians 4:32 – Be kind and compassionate to one another.
- Colossians 3:12 – Clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness.
- 1 Peter 3:8 – Have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.
- Luke 6:35 – Love your enemies and do good.
- 1 Corinthians 13:4 – Love is patient and kind.

Focus: Theme, text evidence, comparison

Reading Assignment: Encounters with misunderstood or struggling animals, such as Celeste, Bruno, or Maximus (Chapters 4, 13, 14, 15, and 20).

Objectives

- Interpret a specific event from the reading that demonstrates kindness and compassion.
- Using a selected Bible verse, describe how Puma's actions help students understand how kindness and compassion can change lives.
- Identify a realistic action that demonstrates how to apply these ideas to daily life.

Teaching Sequence (45 Minutes)

5 min — Ask students to share what they learned about kindness and compassion.

10 min — Ask students to list two ways Puma or others in the book showed kindness and compassion.

10 min — Discuss the text: Why do you think Puma was kind to her friends? What did Puma learn from others about kindness and helping those in need? What did she do that you could also do for a friend?

8 min — Scripture connection: How do you show kindness and compassion to others? What does it mean to love your enemies and do good?

10 min — Have students write about an example of kindness from the story and explain how they could demonstrate similar kindness in their own lives. Ask them to suggest one way their classroom could show kindness to others.

2 min — Have students discuss one practical way to apply what they learned.

Lesson 5. Courage and Trust

Theme: Courage in difficult times. Faith, trust, and courage.

Scripture Connections/Options

- Joshua 1:9 – Be strong and courageous. The Lord will be with you wherever you go.
- Genesis 28:15 – I will not leave you until I have done what I promised.
- Jeremiah 1:8 – Do not be afraid, for I am with you.
- Psalm 46:7 – The Lord is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.
- Isaiah 43:5 – Do not be afraid, for I am with you.

Focus: Narrative point of view, inference

Reading Assignment: Frightening times in Puma's life and her experiences with first responders after the fire (Chapters 2, 3, 6, 9, and 20).

Objectives

- Interpret a specific event from the reading that demonstrates courage and trust.
- Using a selected Bible verse, describe how Puma's experiences help students understand how to have courage in difficult times.
- Identify a realistic action that demonstrates how to apply these ideas to daily life.

Teaching Sequence (45 Minutes)

5 min — Ask students to share what helped them understand courage during difficult times.

10 min — Ask students to identify at least two situations in which Puma showed courage and trust.

10 min — Discuss the text: What situations did Puma encounter that required courage? How did she reveal her fear? When did she show courage even though she was still afraid?

8 min — Scripture connection: What does the Bible teach about courage? How does trusting God help you face frightening or difficult situations?

10 min — Have students find three examples of times Puma showed courage. How did her courage help others? Ask students to describe how being courageous and trusting God has helped them or could help them in the future.

2 min — Have students discuss one practical way to apply what they learned.

Student Worksheet: Have You Ever Felt Like Puma?

Throughout her story, Puma experiences many feelings. Sometimes she feels unwanted, afraid, or unsure of herself. Other times, she wants to do something, but someone tells her she can't. As Puma learns and grows, she discovers courage, friendship, and a place where she belongs. **Think about Puma's experiences. Have you ever felt the same way?**

1. Choose one situation from Puma's story that reminds you of something you have experienced. For example:

- Feeling left out or unwanted.
- Being afraid of something new.
- Wanting to try something, but someone told you that you couldn't.
- Making a mistake or failing at something.
- Having someone believe in you when you weren't sure of yourself.

Describe what happened to Puma in the story.

2. Think about your own life. Describe a time when you experienced a similar feeling or situation. How did you feel, and what did you do?

3.What did Puma learn from her experience? How might her story help you when you face a similar challenge?

4. Faith Connection

Read **Joshua 1:9**, which reminds us that God is with us and encourages us to be strong and courageous.

How can remembering God's love and presence help you when you feel afraid, discouraged, or alone?

Service in Action

Goal: Work as a class to meet a real community need, inspired by the people and programs depicted in Puma.

Possible project

Consider partnering with a local shelter, pet pantry, or senior-services organization to learn what supplies are actually needed.

Students can organize a small collection or prepare messages of encouragement. Participation should never require families to spend money.

Student team roles

- Researchers: confirm what the organization's needs are and obtain donation guidelines.
- Communicators: draft a respectful announcement explaining the project.
- Organizers: establish a plan to count and sort donations.
- Reflectors: explain how the project relates to the story and 1 Peter 4:10 ("Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve other, as faithful stewards of God's grave in its various forms. NIV).

Safeguards

Use approved community partners. Do not share recipients' names or private circumstances. Do not arrange direct animal handling or student deliveries without school and parental approval. Offer a no-cost classroom role for every student.

Final reflection prompts

- What problem did our class identify?
- Which scene in Puma inspired our response?
- How did teamwork help?
- What did we learn about serving without expecting praise?