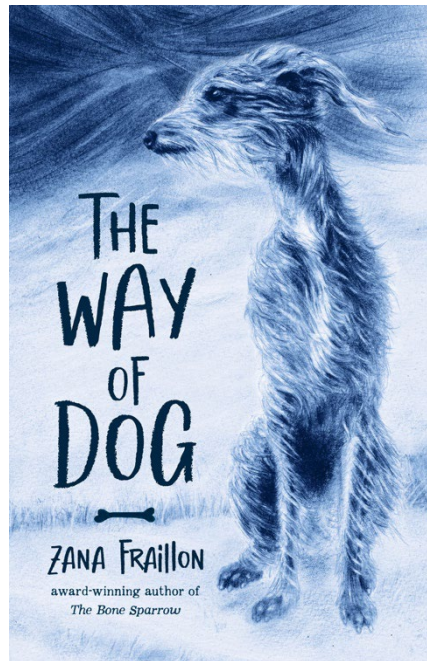


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# THE WAY OF DOG

## Zana Fraillon



### Teachers' Notes

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**SYNOPSIS**

When a young pup is left rejected and unloved at a puppy farm, a quiet, lonely boy helps him escape. Still learning The Way of Dog, Scruffity forms an unbreakable bond with his Manpup as together they search for safety and a place to call home. Met with challenges Scruffity doesn't quite understand, he is nevertheless filled with loyalty, love, and the knowledge that *life is more than a concrete floor*.

Told from Scruffity's perspective in verse form, *The Way of Dog* explores themes of hope, resilience, and kindness in a powerful story about relationships, understanding and the importance of belonging.

**THEMES**

- Love
- Belonging
- Hope
- Resilience
- Kindness
- Loneliness

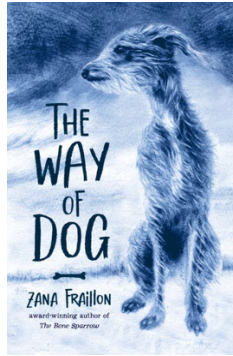
**WRITING STYLE**

*The Way of Dog* is a tender yet at times confronting verse novel told through the first-person narration of Scruffity, a dog that has escaped a cruel puppy farm and is still learning The Way of Dog. Its clever structure and use of original figurative language, combined with Scruffity's pure and vibrant voice, creates a thought-provoking text that is both endearing and evocative. Indeed, Scruffity's worldview cuts through issues of cruelty, rejection, and hopelessness in a distinct and powerful way. Through Scruffity's inner dialogue and his interactions with kind and generous people, Zana Fraillon perfectly captures the inimitable relationship dogs have with humans. Through well-balanced poetic devices and language choices that include Scruffity's unique lexicon, *The Way of Dog* is a tangible, relatable and accessible middle-reader novel. (\*It is noted that the text includes indirect references to domestic violence. It also shares some harsh realities of puppy farms.)

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**STUDY NOTES**

- Before reading, use the front cover and blurb to make predictions about the text. What might *The Way of Dog* be?



- The first verse on pp. 1–2 offers an invitation to readers to fully immerse themselves in this story. Discuss the formatting and use of figurative language in this verse, including the absence of punctuation at the end of many lines. Practise reading the verse aloud to help with fluency and understanding. After completing *The Way of Dog*, re-read this verse. In what ways does it capture the themes of the text?
- The first verse also tells readers that the book is made to be ‘LOUD’ – what does this mean? Does the story change if it is read out loud or in your head? What does performing a piece of text do to the writing? Does it change it in any way? Write your own slam poem to perform to the class, or look up school slam poetry competitions.
- Discuss the illustration on p. 7. Taking on the role of Scruffity, write a journal entry about this day.
- Consider how the author created Scruffity’s voice. Why do you think she chose to write the book as verse? How would it have been different written as prose? As you read *The Way of Dog*, create a glossary of Scruffity’s vocabulary used throughout. Examples include shoe-legs, flat-foot, paw-pad, schnuffle, squirl, thrum, bwibirling and SkySinger. What other techniques has the author used to create Scruffity’s voice?
- Re-create ‘Catching Happiness’ starting on p. 14 either through a dramatic performance, shadow puppet show or drawing.
- How did you feel after reading ‘Choosing Family’ starting on p. 18? Have you ever chosen a puppy from a litter? How does that experience compare with Scruffity’s? Share in a reflection.
- Compare the characters of Manpup and GrowlMan. How are their personalities revealed through the verses in ‘The Barn’ section?
- What is the significance of Manpup giving Scruffity his name? See p. 31.

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- How does Scruffity train humans in *The Way of Dog*? See ‘Training’ on p. 30 and various verses in the part Stone Cages. How does Scruffity use his burgeoning understanding of humans to navigate challenges?
- How is spinning used throughout the text to represent happiness? Give examples to support your thinking.
- Describe the relationship between Scruffity and Manpup. Why does Scruffity say ‘his/hand on my head is the/lick/of my mamma’s tongue’ (p. 22)?
- Discuss the formatting on p. 24, particularly the way that the text ‘hugs’ the illustration. How does this formatting contribute to the verse?
- Each verse is filled with figurative devices and formatting choices that enrich the text. Explore these throughout the text, discussing how they contribute to the narrative. Some examples include:
  - Wordplay eg. ‘pause your paws’ p. 1
  - Repetition – eg. pp. 14, 16, 36–37, 103–105
  - Simile eg. pp. 7, 36, 166
  - Metaphor eg. pp. 22, 47
  - Alliteration – eg. pp. 5, 8, 14
  - Rhyme – eg. pp. 5, 14, 16, 36, 42, 103
  - Rythym – eg. pp. 103–105
  - Imagery – throughout
  - Onomatopoeia – eg. pp 10, 11, 12, 16
- Scruffity’s story is told in six parts: The Barn, Following the River, Big City, New Journeys, Stone Cages and Coming Home. Use these headings to create a story map that summarises the characters, settings, and events of *The Way of Dog*.
- Discuss ‘Hope’ starting on p. 47. In your own words, describe what hope is, and why hope is so important in one’s life.
- Discuss the formatting in the verse ‘Fear’, starting on p. 50. How does this help add meaning to the poem?
- Why, although free, does Scruffity feel helpless (see p. 54)?
- Before starting the part Following the River, make predictions about what might happen in this section. How might life be ‘SO much more in this Outside-of-Barn world (p. 59)?
- What joys is Scruffity discovering on the outside that the ‘MammaDogs’ may never have known existed (pp. 59–60)?
- What is the ‘kind of/hunger’ that Scruffity can’t fill in Manpup (p. 64)?
- How does howling help both Scruffity and Manpup to heal (see pp. 66–67)?
- Reread ‘Love Is’ on p. 70. Explain in your own words what is being shared in this verse. How else could love be described? Add another stanza or two to this poem.

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- What is the significance of Scruffity's RedRipWrap (p. 72)? How is this wrap important throughout the text? (See also p. 87). How would the story be different without it?
- Why, when visiting the town, does Manpup's 'scared and.../sad soak our skin' (p. 73)? What is causing this sadness and fear?
- In a letter to Scruffity, explain how towns and cities work. What advice would you give him?
- How is Scruffity's ability to beg for money so important to the text?
- Discuss the language features used in 'The SnakingMetalMuncher' (pp. 81–83) to depict Scruffity's fear. How is pace used to help convey meaning in this verse? Why is this poem essential to the rest of the story?
- Why does Scruffity think the little 'Dog' that Manpup carves for him is 'Just a Stick' (pp. 86–87)? How is it an important detail later in the book?
- In the role of Scruffity, write a journal entry about Manpup being taken away in the FlashingMetalBeast.
- Recite 'BigCity Learnings' aloud. Discuss the use of rhythm and rhyme in this verse. Why have these devices been used? What does 'BigCity Learnings' share about Scruffity's despair? Why does he say, 'I don't think BigCity is for me' (p. 105)?
- What is it about The Way of Shoe-Legs that Scruffity doesn't understand?
- Sketch the BigCity using the description on p. 105.
- Discuss the use of rhythm, pace, mood, and alliteration in 'The FixingDen' (pp. 117–119).
- How do Scruffity and OldOne help one another? What does this tell us about the importance of friendship and acceptance?
- Discuss 'The Way of Shoe-Legs' on p. 130. What observation does Scruffity make about humans? How does his understanding of humans allow him to help others?
- What enables Scruffity to take 'that fear in my jaws/and [shake] it/free' (p. 136)?
- How is The Way of Fox a Way of Dog too (p. 138)?
- Why does Scruffity say that shoe-legs are 'really ... so easy to train' (p. 139)?
- In what ways is *The Way of Dog* a story about hope and resilience?
- With reference to 'Another Kind of Concrete Floor' on p. 150, discuss the use of concrete as a motif throughout the text.
- Why does Scruffity think his tail has betrayed him (see pp. 162–165)?
- Why does it take PippaPip a little while to warm to Scruffity? How are she and LilaMay helped by Scruffity? How do they help him?

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- Why does Scruffity say that ‘Love Is The/Most Complicated of Beasts’ (p. 176)?
- Why does Scruffity give the Girlpups his ‘Dog’? How might this help them to move forward?
- How does the mantra ‘*Be strong. Be fierce. Life is more...*’ allow Scruffity to help his Girlpups (see pp. 190–191)?
- How is Scruffity affected when his RedRipWrap is removed at the pound (p. 195)?
- How is SunWoman depicted (see pp. 200 and 202)? Why are characters like her important to the text?
- Discuss the formatting of ‘CharlieMan’ on pp. 214–216. Why is this such a gentle, yet powerful verse?
- Choose a verse to annotate, identifying the poetic devices used by the author. Write a short reflection to share your understanding of this verse and its importance to the story.
- In what ways are Scruffity and CharlieMan similar? How do they help one another? How are they both ‘caged’?
- Read ‘Shoe-Leg Brains’ starting on p. 223 aloud. Discuss the use of language features and devices. What is the important message in this verse?
- Discuss the circular structure of *The Way of Dog*. How do story threads and themes from earlier in the text reappear in poignant ways later in the narrative?
- What is the significance of Scruffity going on the train with CharlieMan? How does being ‘A Dog with a Job to Do’ (p. 232) help Scruffity to grow and change?
- Scruffity wonders how ‘these shoe-legs keep growing/their roots deep inside my/heart/only to leave me/when I love them/when I need them so much’ (p. 237). Why, even though he is leaving, does Scruffity call Charlie his ‘forever MyMan’ (p. 239)?
- How does ‘Long Drive’ capture the love between Scruffity and MyCharlieMan so perfectly (p. 245)?
- What does it mean to Scruffity when MyManpup ‘spins Proper Dog’ (p. 248)?
- How would you define ‘the brilliance of a howl’ (p. 250)?
- As you read, compile a list of The Ways of Dog. With a partner, rank these in order of importance. Compare your rankings with another group, giving reasons for your decisions. What, ultimately, is The Way of Dog?
- Discuss the literary elements of mood and voice. How do these strengthen stories?

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- What are the key lessons Scruffity learns throughout his journey? How do mantras such as ‘*Be strong. Be fierce. Life is More...*’ underpin this story? Write a reflection of a time this mantra would have helped you.
- What does Scruffity learn from his mamma? What are two or three important life lessons have you learnt from your parents? Share in a reflection.
- Why have characters such as FatRat, ScratchCat and PatchFox been included in *The Way of Dog*? How do they each play a small but important role in Scruffity’s journey? Write a scene or poem from the point of view of one of the other animal characters.
- What lessons about love and belonging can humans learn from dogs like Scruffity? Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Choose a verse to write in prose form. Alternatively, write your own verse in the role of Scruffity suitable for inclusion in *The Way of Dog*.
- Compare Colin Thompson’s picture book *The Big Little Book of Happy Sadness* or Bruce Pascoe’s novella *Fog a Dox* with *The Way of Dog*.

**AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

*The Way of Dog* is one of those stories that came to me completely out of the blue. I was waist deep in writing another novel when Scruffity trotted up and nuzzled me into action. At the time, I had been investigating the possibility of training my own dog to become an assistance dog for my daughter. My daughter has Tourette’s syndrome, and as part of this will sometimes have what are known as tic fits. We noticed that our dog would go to our daughter before she would start fitting and would lay her head on our daughter’s lap to calm her. As part of my investigation, I began to research not only how to train dogs to become assistance animals, but I also started to investigate the ‘dog umwelt’, or how dogs see the world. During this research, I stumbled upon a documentary about prisoners being used to train assistance dogs. The dogs in the documentary, like Scruffity, had been rescued from the pound, and I was astounded by the beauty and cyclical nature of the training program. The prisoners saved the dogs; the dogs in turn gave the prisoners’ time in jail meaning and brought them much needed company (and often in the process enabled the prisoners to open up and deal with trauma, to connect with someone in a way they hadn’t been able to with humans); and then the dogs would go back into the community to help someone in need.

Halfway through watching the documentary, Scruffity leapt into my head and refused to budge. His voice was clear and strong and demanding, and I was

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immediately in love. What I love about Scruffity is what I love about all dogs. Dogs have a way of getting people to connect. To open up. They do not judge and are the best listeners I know. They love us unconditionally and make a world of difference to our lives. And dogs also have an incredible ability to see things that we don't – whether that is the way they interpret the world, or through picking up on signals from human bodies that we can't see – they communicate that *with* us. They centre us, they bring us down to their time, to their rhythm and their beat. And I couldn't be happier journeying with them.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Zana Fraillon is an internationally acclaimed, multi-award-winning author of books for children and young adults. Her work has been published in over 15 countries and is in development for both stage and screen. She has degrees in history and teaching and is currently undertaking a PhD in Creative Writing at LaTrobe University. Zana's passion for empowering young people to find their voice is a feature of both her books and her work with writers of all ages.