

Children's Literature Reviews

Item 66 of 130

Help me, Mr. Mutt! : expert answers for dogs with people problems

Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel.

Cataloging in Publication

Orlando : Harcourt, 2008.

p. cm.

Annotations:

Dogs across the United States write to Mr. Mutt, a people expert, for help with their humans.

Best Books:

[Kirkus Book Review Stars, March 1, 2008](#) ; United States

State and Provincial Reading Lists:

[Grand Canyon Reader Award, 2010](#) ; Nominee; Picture Books; Arizona

Horn Book Guide:

Fall 2008 Picture Books Rating 3, Recommended, satisfactory in style, content, and/or illustration.

Reading Measurement Programs:

Accelerated Reader

Interest Level Lower Grade

Book Level 2.6

Accelerated Reader Points **0.5**

Reviews:

Stephanie Zvirin (Booklist, Mar. 15, 2008 (Vol. 104, No. 14))

Sisters Stevens and Crummel, dog lovers both, share their affection for canines in this oversize picture book that both adults and kids will like. Bespectacled canine counselor Mr. Mutt dispenses advice to dogs suffering clueless humans and "spoiled rotten" cats. When Famished in Florida (whose tummy is a mere inch from the floor) moans about too little kibble, Mr. Mutt offers strategies: hang around a baby's high chair. It's "raining food." As Mutt tippy-taps advice on his typewriter, tiara-wearing Queen the cat pens snarky responses to those who disparage her species. Finally, having suffered one too many canine cuts, Queen gives "Muttface" his due. Art and text work seamlessly, with plenty of visual and verbal jokes (including goofy sketches and graphs) to entice repeated readings. Even the endpapers are part of the fun, and as usual, Stevens' animals have so much personality, kids will find themselves wanting to take them home. . . well, maybe not Queen. *Grades 1-3*

Ken Marantz and Sylvia Marantz (Children's Literature)

On the front endpapers Mr. Mutt, Canine Counselor, advertises his help with "people problems." The book is a series of letters requesting advice from dogs with problems, followed by Mr. Mutt's helpful replies, complete with sketches and diagrams. After each pair of letters comes a note from the Queen of Cats, commenting on the disparagement of cats that ends each of Mr. Mutt's notes. After several exchanges, Queen cat gets annoyed enough to "take control." The hilarious, wordless, three-page climax when the Queen takes over is followed by the arrival

of one hundred and one dogs on a "rescue mission" for Mr. Mutt. The Queen moves on to advertising her own advice, while Mr. Mutt is "back in business." It is only at the end that we discover that the Queen was living in the same house as Mr. Mutt. The sixteen appealing pups staring at us on the title page win our sympathy from the beginning. Obviously Stevens is a dog lover who depicts them with affection. Mixed media is sensitively employed in some of the scenes that support the clever anecdotes in imaginative ways, while pages of delicate sepia drawings add bits of information. There is both action and fun throughout. 2008, Harcourt, \$17.00. Ages 4 to 9.

Gwynne Spencer (Children's Literature)

It all starts with a weener dog on a forced diet who is writing to Mr. Mutt to ask if she looks fat. Mr. Mutt's answer is "Of course not!" He also recommends the doggie food pyramid, which of course has no place for dry dog food. Because Mr. Mutt is a nationally-known authority on interspecies understanding, he launches his canine counseling business as a way to help other dogs with people problems, writing out of his home in Dogwood, Delaware. He suggests ways small dogs can use teamwork to obtain a wider diet option from atop the counters and helpfully shares tips on how to encourage the baby to yield up extra treats. This book sounds like my dogs wrote it! The Cat (a.k.a. Her Majesty) interjects a note of her own after each reply from Mr. Mutt. Another dog seeks a way to fulfill his cravings for more Frisbee and less television from his people. A basset hound writes to complain about being dressed up by the kids, and Mr. Mutt advises three options (rip-and-run, play dead, grin and bear it) with tips about how to get the kids to dress up the cat instead. Then, there is a letter from a barker who is chastised for noisiness. Mr. Mutt's response includes illustrations of the human and dog brain (guess which is bigger) and other sound advice. A desperate note from a stinky cowdog, a few more repartees from the cat, and next thing you know Mr. Mutt is all tied up. Queenie the Cat takes over the advice column, and 101 woofers have to storm the house, come to Mr. Mutt's rescue, and get that pesky feline out of the picture. The Stevens sister team has captured the funniest expressions on the doggy faces and ensured that Mr. Mutt is destined for fame. Coincidentally, in the *Salem Statesman Journal* there is a weekly column written--allegedly--by a Rottie and a Poodle! This book would be a great start to a unit on advice columns and newspaper features for upper graders who could write their own *Dear Abby* and *Dear Heloise* columns from the dogged-point-of-view (imagine Walter the Farting Dog doing an etiquette column?) This book would be fun to use with students in all grades; the various charts and graphs developed by Mr. Mutt lead students into basic math skills lessons, or it could be used as a basis for a unit on letter writing, nutrition, or geography (all the letters are postmarked). For the younger kids, the back cover includes a list of "hidden pictures" to find in the book, including tennis balls, actual dog hair, pink bunny years and lots and lots of dogs. What a fun book! This gets my WOOF WOOF WOOFER AWARD for funny, and is likely to be in high demand in every library lucky enough to own it. 2008, Harcourt, \$17.00. Ages 5 to 15.

Kirkus (Kirkus Reviews, March 1, 2008 (Vol. 76, No. 5))

Joining that other epistle-toting dog LaRue (first met in *Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School*, 2002), self-described "Canine Counselor" Mr. Mutt fires off savvy solutions for correspondents with a string of doggy dilemmas, from enforced diets and silly costumes to humans who'd rather watch TV than play "fetch." Reminding readers (two-legged ones too, perchance) that it's entirely natural for dogs to bark, play and maybe get a little rank, and also that "it's a dog-eat-treat world," Mr. Mutt suggests coping strategies ("If your people get you in the tub, start shaking"), many of which involve some harassment of the local felines. That last draws counterfire from the Counselor's own cat and, ultimately, a brief coup—depicted in the gleefully disorderly watercolors by a view of the chubby writer tied to his own desk chair with real yarn—that muzzles Mr. Mutt until he's rescued by a charging squad of loyal fans. A host of hilarious dog portraits provide further treats. Three licks ("People call it kisses. We call it dessert.") for the Stevens sisters. 2008, Harcourt, 56p, \$17.00. Category: Picture book. Ages 6 to 8. Starred Review. © 2008 Kirkus Reviews/VNU eMedia, Inc. All rights reserved.

Catherine Trinkle (Library Media Connection, November/December 2008)

The newest collaboration between the Stevens sisters is one classroom teachers from kindergarten through middle school are going to want to know about. This book offers many curricular connections: letter writing, punctuation, vocabulary, graphs, and summarizing. Although presented in letter format it still retains its picture book feel. Mr. Mutt is an advice columnist for 'dogs with people problems.' Each letter begins with a plea by a desperate dog describing a problem and concludes with a P.S. describing the family cat's preferential treatment. Mr. Mutt's replies include a graph describing the extent of the problem along with advice and are written on his own stationery which helps make them easily recognizable. To conclude each section, the family cat has her say on her own stationery. The illustrations are multilayered collage: photographs, letters, an old-fashioned typewriter, bowls

of food, newspaper clippings, bright green yarn, and drawings of many dogs give the reader lots to look at on each page. Be sure to buy multiple copies as students will want to look at their own copy while the teacher reads this delightful book aloud. Highly Recommended. 2008, Harcourt, 56pp., \$17 hc. Ages 5 to 10.

Horn Book (The Horn Book Guide, Fall 2008)

In this witty collection of letters, Mr. Mutt, "Canine Counselor," offers helpful, hilarious advice to dogs who write about their people problems. Since his replies include disparaging remarks about cats, the resident feline (known as "The Queen") threatens to shut down his operation. Expressive mixed-media illustrations feature a haughty kitty, complete with tiara, and a comical array of beleaguered dogs. Category: Picture Books. 2008, Harcourt, 56pp, \$17.00 (hb). *Ages 4 to 9.* Rating: 3: Recommended, satisfactory in style, content, and/or illustration.

Paula Day (The Lorgnette - Heart of Texas Reviews (Vol. 21, No. 2))

This hilarious picture book is about the advice that Mr. Mutt, Canine Counselor, gives to other dogs with "people problems." The Queen, a very pretentious cat, always has advice that sets Mr. Mutt straight in his thinking on any subject. The Queen gets so upset with Mr. Mutt's advice that she takes over for a while, but soon Mr. Mutt is back in business. The text is written in letter form and has lighthearted illustrations that add much to the humor. This would be a charming read-aloud for any primary classroom. Fiction. Grades 1-2. 2008, Harcourt, Unpaged., \$17.00. Ages 6 to 8.

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