Case Study: Using children's book *Buddy & Tilda* to Teach Literacy and Dog Safety to Year 1 pupils

Poster by C Clawson – contact details below

Background to Buddy & Tilda: Over the last few years the UK has seen an increase in dog ownership which has sadly been matched with in an increase in children presenting to hospitals with bite injuries. Catherine Clawson, an NHS Manager working in children's surgery, published 'Buddy & Tilda' to try and promote dog safety messages. The book uses a rhyming narrative with colourful images to promote more positive child dog interactions and encourage discussions around how children interact safely with dogs.

Picture books as educational tools: Research suggests that picture books can help children develop empathy, perspective-taking, and social understanding (1,2). When adults discuss characters' feelings, decisions, and consequences during shared reading, children are better able to apply these lessons to real-world situations (3). This makes picture books a valuable tool for promoting safe and responsible behaviour around dogs, as children can learn to recognise a dog's needs, understand appropriate interactions, and consider how their actions affect others.

Image front page of 'Buddy & Tilda'

School Context: As part of a literacy unit, trainee teacher Charlotte Jones used *Buddy & Tilda* with her Year 1 class. The book was incorporated into a sequence of lessons designed to develop reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, while also introducing important messages about staying safe around dogs. The school, where the lessons, were taught also has its own school dog, making the topic particularly relevant and meaningful for the children.

The Learning Journey

"The children absolutely loved it and were eager to talk about the characters and their personalities." – Charlotte, Trainee Teacher

Lesson 1: Exploring Characters
The class read *Buddy & Tilda* together and discussed the story, characters and themes.
Children then chose either Buddy or Tilda to draw and wrote descriptive sentences about their chosen character. The lesson encouraged pupils to think carefully about character traits and use descriptive vocabulary in their writing.

Lesson 2: Creating New Adventures
Building on their understanding of the story, the children imagined a new adventure for Buddy & Tilda. Many pupils chose familiar settings such as parks and outdoor spaces, creating imaginative storylines and practising their use of ambitious vocabulary. The activity provided an engaging opportunity for creative writing while reinforcing their connection to the characters.

Lesson 3: Learning About Dog Safety
The class revisited the story and used it as a starting point for discussions about safe behaviour around dogs. Pupils explored real-life scenarios, including what to do if they encountered an unfamiliar dog in the park. Through discussion and role-play, they considered how to behave safely, respectfully and responsibly around dogs.

Lesson 4: Sharing Key Safety Messages
To conclude the unit, pupils designed posters highlighting the important dog safety messages they had learned from the book. The posters demonstrated a strong understanding of the story's themes and showed how confidently children could communicate safety advice to others.

Outcomes – Successfully combining literacy & dog safety
The sequence of lessons combined literacy learning with real-life safety education.
Key outcomes included:

- Increased engagement in reading and writing activities.
- Strong use of descriptive and creative language.
- Meaningful discussions about responsible behaviour around dogs.
- Opportunities for role-play and speaking and listening development.
- Improved understanding of dog safety messages.
- High levels of enthusiasm and participation throughout the unit.

More info:

Acknowledgement – sincere thanks to Charlotte Jones for sharing her experience of using Buddy & Tilda in a classroom setting

Selected References: 1.Nikolajeva, 2014 2. Mar et al., 2009 3. Ornaghi et al., 2020