

# **Marley and Me Study Guide**

**Marley and Me by John Grogan (journalist)**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Marley and Me Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Preface: The Perfect Dog and Chapter One: And Puppy Makes Three.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Two: Running with the Blue Bloods and Chapter Three: Homeward Bound.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Four: Mr. Wiggles and Chapter Five: The Test Strip.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Six: Matters of the Heart and Chapter Seven: Master and Beast.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Eight: A Battle of Wills and Chapter Nine: The Stuff Males are Made Of.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Ten: The Luck of the Irish and Chapter Eleven: The Things He Ate.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twelve: Welcome to the Indigent Ward and Chapter Thirteen: A Scream in the Night. .</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Fourteen: An Early Arrival and Chapter Fifteen: A Postpartum Ultimatum.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Sixteen: The Audition and Chapter Seventeen: In the Land of Bochantas.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Eighteen: Alfresco Dining and Chapter Nineteen: Lightning Strikes.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty: Dog Beach and Chapter Twenty-one: A Northbound Plane.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-two: In the Land of Pencils and Chapter Twenty-three: Poultry on Parade.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-four: The Potty Room and Chapter Twenty-five: Beating the Odds.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-six: Borrowed Time and Chapter Twenty-seven: The Big Meadow.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapter Twenty-eight: Beneath the Cherry Trees and Chapter Twenty-nine: The Bad Dog Club .....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Style.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>





# Plot Summary

John Grogan holds fond memories of his childhood pet, a mutt dog named Shaun. John and his newlywed wife, Jenny, are contemplating having children and decide that a dog will be good parenting practice. The couple visits a local breeder specializing in Labrador retrievers where Jenny picks out a rambunctious, gangly puppy. The puppy is named Marley after Bob Marley, whose music welcomed John and Jenny to South Florida. Marley proves to be nothing like Shaun. He is a salivating, headstrong, damage-effecting, barreling-through-life flash of yellow fur. Marley is kicked out of obedience school and almost barred from the Grogan household, but in the end turns out to be an excellent teacher of love and loyalty. Marley is the world's best worst dog.

John and Jenny's life with Marley soon becomes a comfortable routine. Jenny immediately falls into a nurturing-mother mode and meticulously combs Marley for any sign of fleas. She comes home from work on her lunch hour in order to feed, water and exercise him. John takes Marley for a walk every morning, and the entire family spends the evening playing in the backyard or walking the nearby beach trails. Their happiness is not without mishaps, however. Marley is terrified of thunderstorms. He turns the garage into a bloody battlefield every time a storm hits as he tries to escape the noise. Tranquilizers help mildly, but for his entire life Marley shudders at the first sign of thunder and lightning. Marley also loves to eat things including, overripe mangoes, delicate gold necklaces, shoes, pillows and kitty litter.

For all his shortcomings, Marley proves himself truly loyal and completely devoted to the Grogan's. When Jenny suffers a miscarriage, Marley sits with his head in her lap as she sobs into his fur. During Jenny's second viable pregnancy, she is put on bed rest. Marley becomes her constant companion, bringing her toys and sleeping next to her side of the bed. Marley senses that Jenny needs him to be strong for her. His usually flamboyant demeanor becomes respectful in the face of Jenny's physical and emotional needs. Even when Jenny is suffering from postpartum depression and pummels Marley with her fists after he destroys a couch cushion, Marley sits patiently, allowing his mistress to vent her frustration. Marley's ability to sense what his family needs and rise to the occasion is a testament to his love for the Grogans. John realizes as Marley approaches old age that the wild puppy has really become a wise teacher. Simply by being Marley, he has brought John and Jenny closer together as a couple, provided protection and friendship to the entire family and shown everyone who ever met him that life is met to be lived to its fullest, even if it means replacing several door screens and buying new furniture here and there.

Marley's hysterical and heartwarming story touches the reader deeply. It is impossible not to remember one's own treasured pets and the lessons that they taught. The reader cannot help falling in love with this rascally dog, who brings vitality to all who know of him. By the end of the book, the reader is almost wishing that s/he, too, had a Marley of her/his own and is saddened by the Grogan's loss when Marley dies. Marley came into the Grogan household to teach John and Jenny how to parent, but he ended up teaching them how to live.



# Preface: The Perfect Dog and Chapter One: And Puppy Makes Three

## Preface: The Perfect Dog and Chapter One: And Puppy Makes Three Summary and Analysis

In 1967, as a ten-year-old boy, the author talks his father into getting a gold colored mutt puppy named Shaun. He chose Shaun because he was the boldest of the litter. Grogan and Shaun were best buddies for fourteen years and Grogan measures all future dogs against his experience with Shaun.

About a year into his marriage, John finds his wife, Jenny, circling items in the newspaper. They both work for competing newspapers and often pour over their articles making corrections and notes, but John sees Jenny is circling pet ads. After some discussion, John learns that the plant he gave Jenny is dying and so she wants to raise a puppy to see if she can do okay with it before she takes the risk of having a baby herself. The plant dying got Jenny to worrying that she could not successfully care for a living creature

The couple go to a farm and view some lab puppies. The one Jenny likes is lower-priced than the others and sees a little hyperactive. John gives in to Jenny's pleas and they contract with the farmer to return at weaning and adopt the pup. As they are leaving, a male lab, full of mud and burrs and behaving riotously comes running past them. John is sure (with trepidation) that this is the father of the litter.

Almost every child remembers one particular pet that stood out above the rest. This pet could do no wrong and behaved perfectly at all times. There is nothing wrong with preferring one pet over another or fondly recalling the best times spent with that animal. However, as John is quickly realizing, not every pet can reach such high standards. If the owner is too firmly enmeshed with the past pet, then the new animal will not thrive in the household. A medium must be struck where the owner understands that each pet is different and needs to be appreciated for its own special characteristics.

New couples often contemplate their capabilities as parents based on their ability to parent a pet. What most first-time parents do not readily acknowledge is that animals and babies are worlds apart.



# Chapter Two: Running with the Blue Bloods and Chapter Three: Homeward Bound

## Chapter Two: Running with the Blue Bloods and Chapter Three: Homeward Bound Summary and Analysis

John and Jenny argue over a name for the new pup. When they moved to South Florida from the Midwest, neither had heard of reggae music. Soon, it became their favorite sound, so it was natural for the couple to play Marley to soothe their argument about the new dog's name. As the music flows through the house, the couple looks at one another and immediately exclaims, "Marley!" Since the puppy is a pure bred and can be registered with the American Kennel Club, John decides give it a name worthy of registration: Grogan's Majestic Marley of Churchill. In his research, John learns that labs are largely known for their loyalty, easy-going nature and intelligence. The only downfalls appear to be their energy levels and large beating tails. John things of the wild lab, which is half of Marley's inheritance and silently hopes that Marley will take after his mother, though is happy with their breed choice.

Jenny is supposed to go with her sister and family to Disney at the time Marley is to come home, so John convinces her to keep the commitment. John's ulterior motive is to have Jenny out of the way as he establishes himself as the top (alpha) dog. John is shocked to find that Marley is now twice as big as when they first saw him. That night John places Marley in a cardboard box in the garage and goes to bed. After half an hour, John is still awake, and Marley is still yipping from his solitary confinement. John brings Marley, still in his box, into his room, and they fall asleep with John's arm draped over the side of the bed dangling into the box.

John's aristocratic naming of Marley gives the reader a chuckle, especially since it seems certain that little Marley will favor his mud-covered sire over his serene mother. The reader can already see that John has slipped back into the mind of the ten-year-old boy anxiously picking out his first dog. John is anticipating Marley to be a second Shaun. He is eager to train this new puppy as easily and efficiently as he did Shaun. John's desire to be an alpha male is diminished the first night Marley is home. Unable to stick to his guns and let the dog cry it out in the garage, John gives in and brings the puppy into his own room. John was worried that Jenny was going to be the too soft with the puppy and by association their children, but it appears that John is going to be the relenting father.



# Chapter Four: Mr. Wiggles and Chapter Five: The Test Strip

## Chapter Four: Mr. Wiggles and Chapter Five: The Test Strip Summary and Analysis

Jenny instantly begins mothering Marley. Marley is housebroken fairly quickly. The growing pup soon has the back yard covered in "fertilizer." John and Jenny learn to "baby" proof their home. Anything above knee height must be moved to higher ground away from his dangerous tail. Like all babies, he loves to put things in his mouth and the "Marley Mambo" indicates something new is in his jaws.

John, Jenny and Marley soon settle into a comfortable routine. They each walk Marley once a day and a third time together. Jenny has become a nurturing mother. When Marley begins choking one evening, Jenny retrieves a ball of cellophane from the back of Marley's throat. Based on their time with Marley, they decide it's time to stop birth control. One day Jenny invites a co-worker and her basset hound over for a play date. Jenny is appalled to find Marley full of fleas after the basset leaves. She gives a full force attack on the fleas, and Marley is once again scratch free. A few weeks after the flea incident Jenny announces that her period is over a week late. A trip to the drugstore and a blue test strip confirms Jenny's pregnancy. As John and Jenny hug in celebration, Marley does the Marley Mambo. John reaches in and retrieves the blue test strip from Marley's throat.

Life with Marley is settling into a comfortable routine. There is an air of hope and promise in the Grogan household. Marley may be a rambunctious child, but John and Jenny are handling their new addition fairly well, which shows that they will make suitable parents. John and Jenny have successfully weathered the first few weeks of bringing home a new baby. They have also had Marley's first play date and his first illness. The attack on the flea infestation by Jenny shows her "mother dog" instincts at their fullest as she refuses to let any outside force bring danger to her baby or her home. The idea that they will indeed make good parents is encouraged by the positive pregnancy test. John views Marley's eating of the test strip as a sign that the puppy is not looking forward to having to share Mom and Dad with a brother or sister, but he could have just been expressing his joy in the only way he knew how.



# Chapter Six: Matters of the Heart and Chapter Seven: Master and Beast

## Chapter Six: Matters of the Heart and Chapter Seven: Master and Beast Summary and Analysis

At five months old, Marley has grown so tall that while standing on his hind legs, he can rest his front paws on John's shoulders. Although Marley is more likely to lick a person to death, John is glad that outsiders perceive Marley as a vicious attack dog. John and Jenny live in a relatively safe neighborhood, but petty theft exists and even a murder occurred across the street. Marley's presence makes both John and Jenny feel a little safer.

Jenny dives into pregnancy with a vengeance eating healthy meals and not drinking sodas and alcohol. Though they had intended to not say anything, soon everyone knows about the pregnancy as the couple head for their first doctor visit. The doctor verifies the pregnancy but sadly announces that the fetus is dead. Jenny has surgery to remove the dead fetus. Marley seems to sense his mistress's unhappiness and sits quietly with his head buried in Jenny's lap. For several days Jenny remains in a morose state. The two and Marley go to a nearby beach, where John attempts to teach Marley the art of fetch, which is only halfway successful—he fetches by does not return the stick. John buys Jenny some carnations, but as he goes to present them, he notices only bare stems; there are still a few petals in Marley's mouth. Jenny laughs until she cries and the next morning John awakens to see Jenny sleeping peacefully beside him.

There is an ominous feeling at the beginning of Chapter Six. The reader has assumed all along that John and Jenny lived in an affluent neighborhood of young families and perfectly-manicured lawns. The revelation that there was a murder across the street comes as a shock to the reader in the same way it shocked John and Jenny. The description of the murder also functions as a foreshadowing of the dead fetus. Again there is the sense of shock for both John and Jenny and the reader when the fetus is dead. How could such a thing happen? Most readers will understand the emotions flooding the Grogans either from personal experience or from knowing others who have suffered this heartrending loss. There are no words for a situation like this. John cannot suitably comfort Jenny, and the reader cannot formulate a sympathetic response.



# Chapter Eight: A Battle of Wills and Chapter Nine: The Stuff Males are Made Of

## Chapter Eight: A Battle of Wills and Chapter Nine: The Stuff Males are Made Of Summary and Analysis

At six months old, Marley begins obedience class. Marley drags first Jenny and then John through the class and the instructor tells them that they must get "that animal" under control. The next week the instructor takes Marley from John, who watches the instructor being pulled behind Marley. After class the instructor kicks Marley out of class. John begins his own obedience classes in the backyard. The next afternoon, Jenny tells John to look in the garage, where he finds Marley is lying on his carpet covered with dried blood. John notices that Marley has destroyed rugs and the door frame, clawed paint off the walls and eaten the ironing board. The Grogans realize that their dog is afraid of thunderstorms and during the one that afternoon Marley was making every attempt to gain access to the house. The search for a good vet begins to try to find help for Marley. After three failures, the Grogans meet Jay Butan, who has an innate understanding of the animals. Dr. Jay prescribes anti-anxiety medication for fear of storms. The vet recommends neutering Marley, and John is appalled but realizes that Marley really should not be cloned. Jenny steps up efforts to conceive another baby. John becomes exhausted by their efforts, but the final straw comes when he opens his eyes to find Marley slobbering on the bed as John and Jenny are making love. On the way to the vet clinic the day of the neutering, Marley behaves so badly that John's feeling of remorse at having Marley neutered is gone.

Marley as a test case of how well the Grogans will handle parenthood goes above and beyond his duty. The reader is able to sit back and enjoy Marley's antics from the comfort of their chair. There is the hope that this dog will never cross their path, and yet, a small desire rises that one day they could have the distinct pleasure of seeing a slathering, yellow mass hurdling their way. Marley may be an incorrigible dog with a strong preference for his own rules but there is something endearing about him. The moment Marley laid his head calmly in Jenny's lap following her miscarriage, he became the perfect pet. He joins the ranks of Saint Shaun. In many ways Marley usurps Shaun by being a perfect mess of loving chaos. There is the desire to see more like him and yet to never have another Marley grace the planet.



# Chapter Ten: The Luck of the Irish and Chapter Eleven: The Things He Ate

## Chapter Ten: The Luck of the Irish and Chapter Eleven: The Things He Ate Summary and Analysis

John surprises Jenny with a three-week vacation to Ireland, but they must find a suitable dog wrangler. Jenny asks one of her co-workers, Kathy, who is single, athletic, although a bit timid, and she says yes. John outlines in extreme detail Marley's care. As John and Jenny pull out of the driveway, Kathy stands beside Marley looking more than a little unsure. Ireland proves to be just what the Grogans need. They spend their days exploring at and at night stay in bed and breakfasts. For John, any chance of sexual activity is aborted by the creaking beds and numerous pictures of the Pope and Virgin Mary. Jenny, on the other hand, relishes the inappropriateness of the situation and entices John to make love. The results of all their merrymaking is soon evident upon their return home: Jenny is pregnant again.

They do not spill the beans to anyone and take extreme measures to reduce the use of chemicals around the house. Jenny suffers from severe nausea, but when the Grogans see their little boy for the first time on the sonogram, she is happy to put up with feeling ill. John works to re-establish the master and beast relationship lost while on vacation. Jenny and John decide to leave Marley free in the house for brief periods while they are out with a fifty-percent success rate. Once John has to search Marley's poop for a gold necklace he ate. He is successful, and they joke that they will start a jewelry cleaning business after discovering that Marley's insides have cleaned the chain to a radiant shine.

John and Jenny have been working at a reckless pace learning to handle Marley and trying to conceive another baby. Stress ultimately builds up until the environment in the house is not conducive to a relaxing marital relationship or to maintaining patience for training a rambunctious animal. The couple is in desperate need of a vacation so they can recharge their batteries and remove some of the intensity surrounding their current lives. Focusing so intently on becoming pregnant again is almost a sure fire way to make certain Jenny will not get pregnant. John and Jenny need to bring the romance back to their marriage and remove the stress; however, John and Jenny cannot stay carefree forever. Revitalized, they return from their trip ready to resume normal activity but with a more relaxed attitude. The approach appears to work, since Jenny learns that she is indeed pregnant again, and Marley quickly realizes that his little vacation is over, too.



# Chapter Twelve: Welcome to the Indigent Ward and Chapter Thirteen: A Scream in the Night

## Chapter Twelve: Welcome to the Indigent Ward and Chapter Thirteen: A Scream in the Night Summary and Analysis

John and Jenny upgrade the traditional birthing room to a birthing suite at the hospital; however, when the big day arrives both the suites and regular rooms are full. Jenny is shuffled to a section of the hospital affectionately referred to by the staff as "the indigent ward." The nursing staff of this ward is the best the hospital has to offer, since most of the babies born to migrant workers are high-risk due to their lack of prenatal care. John waits anxiously with the Mexican fathers, who all share the universal expression of concern mixed with helplessness. Once baby Patrick arrives, a deluxe suite opens up, but even the gourmet dinner holds no comparison to the thrill of holding the tiny baby. The next hurdle is to introduce the baby to Marley. During the weeks leading up to Patrick's arrival, John and Jenny included Marley on all the baby preparations. John prepares Marley by bringing home a receiving blanket used by Patrick. Marley turns out to be a great protector of the baby, sleeping next to Patrick's crib and providing a mountain for the crawling baby to scale. The family falls into a natural routine in no time. Nine months later, Jenny is pregnant again.

Jenny's late night cravings return full force with the second pregnancy. John is out late to fill Jenny's food cravings. He and Jenny both begin encountering more and more crime around the neighborhood, not just petty theft, but assault and murder and robbery.

These two chapters focus on the difference between the expected and reality. John and Jenny thought they needed a fancy birthing suite, but the gourmet dinner that John dreamed about before Patrick's arrival does not taste as good after the baby is born. Any parent can identify with the feelings John and Jenny experience at the birth of their son. Everything else in life fades away and nothing is as sweet as the sight of that tiny bundle looking at you with pure love.

The Grogans are also rewarded for their hard work with Marley, but surprisingly, Marley settles in to the role of protector and new best friend quite naturally. Despite all of Marley's outlandish behavior, he has a strong innate ability to sense emotions and ultimately know what is expected of him. John is not so sure that Marley will be a good protector against criminals but one incident of crime in the neighborhood proves him wrong. The family has coalesced into a united whole.



# **Chapter Fourteen: An Early Arrival and Chapter Fifteen: A Postpartum Ultimatum**

## **Chapter Fourteen: An Early Arrival and Chapter Fifteen: A Postpartum Ultimatum Summary and Analysis**

Jenny rouses John early one morning with the news that the second baby is on its way. She is having contractions every six minutes, but Jenny is only twenty-one weeks along. At the hospital, Jenny is given a labor inhibitor to stop her contractions and remains hospitalized for two weeks. John is left alone and Jenny's well-oiled household becomes a barely-functioning bachelor pad in a matter of hours. Jenny figures out what's happening and calls in John's Aunt Anita for reinforcements. At home, Jenny is on bed rest for the next twelve weeks, and there is little to relieve the monotony that leads to depression. Finally, Jenny is free of confinement. She immediately scoops up Patrick, plays with Marley in the backyard and takes over the housework. The next day Jenny once again experiences contractions, and Conor Grogan enters the world, thriving at thirty-five weeks.

John and Jenny return home from the hospital to begin their life as a family of four plus Marley. The sullen mood that afflicted Jenny during her bed rest continues to rear its head following Conor's birth. Busy with the new baby, suffering from lack of sleep and trying to maintain their sanity wears on both John and Jenny. Soon Jenny begins to take her frustrations out on Marley. Jenny adamantly insists that Marley be given away. Unwilling to give up on the animal, John spends every spare minute training Marley, who improves tremendously. Jenny returns to her old self; Marley's fate is safe as Jenny romps with him in the backyard.

These two chapters are the darkest point of the whole book. The reader feels terrible for Jenny as she suffers through three and a half months of bed rest. Even more disconcerting is the depression that takes hold of Jenny. Postpartum depression is a very serious affliction that often gets treated lightly by those who do not understand it. The stress mounts on Jenny as she tries to cope with a difficult pregnancy, a newborn, a toddler and an out-of-control dog. Thankfully Jenny does not vent her frustrations on the children but her pent-up rage must go somewhere. As always, Marley is a compliant partner. Just as he comforted Jenny after the loss of the first baby, Marley calmly endures Jenny's pummeling fists. Although Jenny appears firm in her stance that Marley be removed from the home, the reader continues to hope that she will soon relent. Jenny needs Marley even if she cannot currently see it, and Marley wants nothing more than to continue loving Jenny.



# Chapter Sixteen: The Audition and Chapter Seventeen: In the Land of Bochantas

## Chapter Sixteen: The Audition and Chapter Seventeen: In the Land of Bochantas Summary and Analysis

Marley gets a part acting in a movie being shot locally. The first scene requires Marley to ride in a minivan with two young children and then calmly exit with the little boy. Take after take shows Marley zooming past the cameras in his excitement to play with his co-stars. The Grogans are told they will be notified if the director needs Marley back, and John is sure that their shot at stardom is over, but they receive a summons for Marley. The director loved Marley's antics and wants to use him in more scenes. For the next several days, John wanders the movie lot beaming with pride over his star dog and bragging to anyone who will listen. They never receive the advance copy as promised, but John finds a copy of *The Last Home Run* and they watch it. At the end of the film, in big letters, is Marley's name in the cast list. The Grogans move from West Palm Beach to Boca Raton for more living space. The move is ironic because John pokes fun at residents of Boca in his columns, but the house is twice the size of the West Palm Beach house. John takes some ribbing from neighbors, but overall the Grogans are welcomed to the area.

Marley takes to the pool, which they fence for the safety of the boys but also to keep Marley from spending his days paddling in the water. Marley must stay in the house when they go out, but they risk complete destruction of their home should a storm arise while they are out. John and Jenny purchase an industrial strength dog cage to house Marley when they are out., but Marley almost destroys the cage in his attempt to get out during a storm. It appears that nothing will ever cure Marley of his intense fear.

Goofy, slobbery Marley really is the quintessential family pet. He is loving and desires only to please. Marley is oblivious to the fact that he is a working dog and pursues his film career with the same reckless abandon that he pursues everything. To Marley life is something to be lived to the fullest, not waded through cautiously.

While Marley is out loving life, John suffers a minor personal setback. The move to the new house means John must eat a large serving of crow. He routinely pokes fun at the lifestyle of the people living in Boca Raton. John views their obsession with their looks, their accent and their tiny dogs ridiculous and has not held back his opinion in print. Now John is about to become a member of the Boca crowd. John's experience shows how things you say at one point can come back to kick you in the pants later.



# Chapter Eighteen: Alfresco Dining and Chapter Nineteen: Lightning Strikes

## Chapter Eighteen: Alfresco Dining and Chapter Nineteen: Lightning Strikes Summary and Analysis

Marley sticks out in Boca Raton like a sore thumb. One day at one of the many outdoor eateries, they tether Marley to the table leg and settle in to eating. Marley sees a poodle across the courtyard, and suddenly their table is flying across dining area. Jenny informs the waiter that the family will be paying for their drinks and leaving. John continues to read up on Labs. He reads *No Bad Dogs* by Barbara Woodhouse who believes there is no such thing as a bad dog, only lenient owners, although there are some dogs who suffer from mental abnormalities. John is shocked when she says such dogs should be put to sleep. There is an English lab group and an American group. The English strain is smaller, gentler and calmer in temperament. The American breed is known for endless energy and are larger and stronger. John immediately recognizes to which group Marley belongs. John and Jenny love parenthood. Patrick and Conor supply endless happy memories and in January 1997, Jenny gives birth to a baby girl, Colleen. John and Jenny leave Marley to guard Colleen while they hide behind a bush and watch and elderly couple facinated at the sight of Marley standing watch over Colleen's carriage. John experiences Marley's fear of thunderstorms himself when he and Marley are in the back yard and John waits too long to go inside and they are knocked over by a crashing lightening bolt that hits nearby. John holds the shaking Marley and promises to take Marley's fears seriously from then on.

The Marley stories that make up these two chapters endears the dog to the reader. Marley is a big ball of fun that refuses to acknowledge that, like John, he is growing older. John contemplates Marley's outlook on life. Marley is six years old, which translates to forty-two in people years, but he is still a puppy at heart. Marley crashes through life oblivious of other people's perception of him. As strong as Marley appears outwardly, he will never outgrow his fear of storms. Marley has been more than willing to provide support when his humans needed a shoulder to lean on; now John can finally reciprocate.



# Chapter Twenty: Dog Beach and Chapter Twenty-one: A Northbound Plane

## Chapter Twenty: Dog Beach and Chapter Twenty-one: A Northbound Plane Summary and Analysis

John's hours are flexible and he is able to spend days bicycling park trails, climbing trees, fishing or going to the beach, all in the name of researching a story. Eagerly searching for a promising story, John stumbles across Dog Beach. The majority of beaches in South Florida have banned dogs but one shining stretch of sand has remained a haven for four-legged beach-goers. John loads Marley into the car for a day at the beach. John is careful to follow the unwritten rules of Dog Beach. John sets Marley free to chase the waves but is unable to prevent Marley from urinating and then later vomiting into the water. Later, Marley poop on the sand as John runs to stop him. The other beach-goers harangue John until he and Marley pack up and to home. Marley is forever banned from Dog Beach.

John loves his job as a columnist but one day he finds a job posting for a managing editor of an Organic Gardening magazine. Two weeks later John is on a flight to Emmaus, Pennsylvania for a job interview. Two months later the family is on board a plane, which is subjected to Marley's pathetic howling from the deep bowels of the cargo bay.

Marley's escapades at Dog Beach signal the family's eventual move North. The days of carefree frolicking are ending. John's chance browsing of the Organic Gardening website is a sign that it is time to settle down. The children are getting older and it would be beneficial for them to experience a new environment that is more relaxed and nurturing. While South Florida offered John and Jenny an exciting life as young newlyweds, Pennsylvania beckons as a comforting place to raise a family and grow older.



# **Chapter Twenty-two: In the Land of Pencils and Chapter Twenty-three: Poultry on Parade**

## **Chapter Twenty-two: In the Land of Pencils and Chapter Twenty-three: Poultry on Parade Summary and Analysis**

The kids are reluctant to move and no snow is present for Christmas only confirms their rebellion. Just as the children are ready to mutiny, the sky breaks loose and the landscape is buried beneath a foot of snow. The kids, John, and Marley romp in the snow, tobogganing and sledding. As the editor of an organic gardening magazine, John is dedicated to running his own household as naturally as possible. John and Jenny decide to invest in chickens. Chickens will provide a source of fertilizer, pest control and food. The neighbor advises them not to name the chicks. When John arrives home the day the chicks arrive, he is greeted by Conor, Patrick, Colleen and Jenny each holding a fluffy chick and each one has been named. John notices that Marley has subtly changed and figures out that Marley has lost his hearing and is slowing down, although he is no less mischievous. John reflects on how fast the time has gone since they first brought the puppy home. Somehow Marley has morphed from childhood to uncontrollable adolescence to aged dog before John's eyes but without John noticing.



# Chapter Twenty-four: The Potty Room and Chapter Twenty-five: Beating the Odds

## Chapter Twenty-four: The Potty Room and Chapter Twenty-five: Beating the Odds Summary and Analysis

As Marley grows older, he develops a few odd habits, one of which involves sneaking away from the house. One night John lets Marley out to go potty before bed and later is nowhere to be seen. After searching the entire property, they return home to find Marley under the porch overhang. Stairs also pose some difficulty to Marley's arthritic hips; however, Marley continues to follow the family wherever they go. Marley starts taking his time going up or down the front steps.

Marley's aging prompts John to leave Organic Gardening and return to the world of newspapers. Although he has a forty-five minute commute each way, he is happier back in a newsroom. Not long after John begins his new job, a large snowstorm hits the Grogans' community. Unable to travel, John works from home for three days. Even as old as he is, Marley still plows through the snow for the perfect potty spot, ignoring the place John clears for him. That summer, Jenny and the kids visit her sister for a week in Boston. John stays at home to work but must still commute into Philadelphia each day, leaving Marley alone, but Marley can't control his bladder. John boards Marley at a nearby vet and later in the day receives a call from the vet that Marley has gastric torsion. The vet was able to successfully relieve the gas pressure but the next day will be difficult for Marley. The vet says once this problem occurs, it tends to recur and the dog needs surgery. John and Jenny talk about it and realize that they may not have Marley much longer. John takes a fully-recovered Marley home; he has beaten the slim odds predicted by the vet. That night John lays on the floor next to Marley and remembers their first night together.

It seems that Marley has gone from hyperactive puppy to struggling elderly dog overnight, the decline being so gradual that John almost did not notice. Unfortunately, no one is able to deny that Marley's life is rapidly coming to an end. The thought is sobering and unwanted. Marley seems unprepared to face his own death and fights to keep himself with his loved ones a bit longer. John is motivated by Marley to return to his true passion. Rather than wake-up one day to find himself unhappily aging at a job he does not love, John returns to journalism in its purest form to feel younger—what a gift from Marley.



# Chapter Twenty-six: Borrowed Time and Chapter Twenty-seven: The Big Meadow

## Chapter Twenty-six: Borrowed Time and Chapter Twenty-seven: The Big Meadow Summary and Analysis

After several weeks recuperating, Marley is soon back to his old mischievous ways. John walks into the kitchen one night to find Marley standing on his hind legs eating Rice Krispies treats off a plate. On the second anniversary of the September 11, terrorist attacks, John travels to Shanksville, Pennsylvania, the site of the crashed United Flight 93, in order to work on a piece for his column. John visits the crash site and talks to friends and family of the people who died that day. John is having difficulty finding a unique angle to the story. John sits quietly, watching the sunset and a giant American flag snapping in the breeze. The emotion of the place floods over him. He realizes that everyone lives on borrowed time, including Marley, whose time is fast approaching.

A week later, Marley has fallen down the stairs and is lying in a heap at the bottom. Marley seems stiff, but is moving. However, he will not go outside to pee. John is upstairs working when Marley appears in the bedroom doorway. John sits on the floor to pet Marley and whispers, "You're going to tell me when it's time, right?"

Winter arrives and John worries that Marley will not make it through another harsh year. Just before Christmas the Grogans go to Disney World. When they return home, Marley begins to vomit mucus and the vet says that Marley's stomach has flipped again. John gets down on his knees to run his fingers through Marley's hair. John tells him that no matter what, he is a great dog. John drives Marley home.

John and the rest of the Grogans have to say good-bye to Marley forever. The inner sensor that has guided Marley to give comfort and protection at appropriate times throughout his life now prompts him to begin preparing his owners for his death.

The odds are firmly stacked against Marley when his stomach twists the first time, but he knows that his family is not there to say good-bye and he must hang on. John and Jenny have been warned that they must acknowledge Marley's old age. Marley's refusal to stop climbing stairs and following the family around is his own way of saying good-bye. He wants to spend as much time as he can with the Grogans, loving them, imparting final bits of wisdom and letting them acquire a few more memories. Marley is indeed telling John that the time is approaching. When Marley's stomach twists again, he does not fight to come back. He has settled his affairs and made sure that his family will be able to survive without him. Marley has lived a long, good life loving a fine family. He has not been the perfect dog in his actions, but his heart has always been in the right place, and that makes him a good dog.



# Chapter Twenty-eight: Beneath the Cherry Trees and Chapter Twenty-nine: The Bad Dog Club

## Chapter Twenty-eight: Beneath the Cherry Trees and Chapter Twenty-nine: The Bad Dog Club Summary and Analysis

John wakes early the next day and goes out to dig Marley's grave. When the hole is sufficiently deep, John takes a break and goes inside where Jenny has just told the children about Marley. Conor and Colleen draw pictures to place in the grave with Marley, and then the whole family walks outside for a final good-bye. John places Marley in the hole; the children place their mementos inside, and John fills in the grave.

The weeks after Marley's death are ones of silence in the Grogan household. John struggles write a farewell to Marley column. Monday morning John begins to write about how weird it felt to be outside digging without Marley. John describes Marley's wild nature and the fact that he was kicked out of obedience school. John also tells about Marley's empathy, intuition and pure heart. John reveals that Marley was also a great teacher. When John is finished, he feels as if a great weight has been lifted from his shoulders.

The morning after Marley's tribute column runs, John's email and phone in-boxes are full. Most of John's columns draw responses, but this one has overwhelmingly touched the hearts of his readers. John hears stories of dogs that shred curtains, eat chocolate center pieces, eat bras and swallow diamond engagement rings. One woman calls to say that her dog even ate John's article, which she had clipped out to save.

Eventually, John is able to remember Marley with less pain and more happiness. The following summer when John installs a pool, he thinks about how much Marley would have loved splashing in the water. Though some things are easier without Marley, they both feel something is not quite right. Jenny hands John the newspaper with a picture of that week's featured pet for adoption. The picture staring back at John is Marley. The dog's name is Lucky and the paragraph about him advertises him as "full of zip." John and Jenny decide that it could not hurt just to look at this puppy.

John digs one hole to bury Marley in but it fills with water to become a swampy mess. He has unwisely chosen his burial site. This first hole represents what everyone who has ever lost a pet feels immediately after the death. The tears flow and fill up the hole but without substance. The hole remains a hole except that it is now a blubbery mess. John's second hole does not fill with water because it is in the right spot. There is comfort to be found beneath the cherry trees. John is able to dig Marley's grave and



give his dog a proper burial. The perfect spot allows John to begin healing. Marley created the hole, and he is the only one who can fill it again. Fond memories take the place of the actual dog.

Just like Marley's grave that will require additional dirt to fill in the low spots, the responses John receives from his readers help to fill up the hole in John. Knowing that others have had a "Marley" gives John comfort. As he says, there is a whole society of bad dogs who steal their owner's hearts. Perhaps these dogs are more memorable than the ones who never cause problems. Marley's unique disposition makes him more than the family pet; he is family. It is this quality that John's readers respond to and understand.



# Characters

## Marley

Marley is a golden Labrador retriever. He is rambunctious, strong-willed, a trouble-maker, property destroyer, shoulder to cry on and teacher.

John and Jenny Grogan decide to get a dog as training for being parents. Jenny picks out Marley after he runs at her while his brothers and sisters shrink back from John's scare tactics. Marley's mother is calm-tempered while the only glimpse the couple gets of his father is a muddy blur screaming out of the woods and whipping around the house. John is a little concerned that Marley will take after his crazed father, but they purchase the puppy anyway. Marley is named after Bob Marley, whose music welcomed John and Jenny when they moved to South Florida from the Midwest.

Marley is constantly in trouble but only because he loves life and is anxious to live every moment to its fullest. Marley tears up throw rugs, destroys an ironing board, poops massive quantities in the backyard, strains at his leash, gets kicked out of obedience school, tries to eat Jenny's positive pregnancy test and pulls an entire table after him as he chases a poodle. With all of his shortcomings, the reader wonders why John and Jenny bother to keep him. The truth is that Marley is just what the Grogan's need in their life.

Marley brings John and Jenny closer together in the early days of their marriage. His care requires both of their attention. When Jenny suffers a miscarriage and John is at a loss as to how to comfort his wife, it is Marley who offers his soft head as a place to soak up Jenny's tears. Marley shows John that life is meant to be lived and prompts John to follow his heart working as a journalist.

Marley is more than a pet. He is a teacher. John does not realize how much Marley has taught him until Marley is approaching the end of his life. Marley has lived each day of his life to the fullest with no regrets. He shows the Grogan's that simple, pure love will see them through the hardest of times. He makes them realize that life is very short and one must follow their heart before it is too late. Marley's story is one of love, friendship, undying devotion and energy. He is the world's best worst dog.

## John Grogan

John Grogan is a tall, athletic man. He enjoys exploring the outdoors with his young wife, Jenny, and relishes his career as a newspaper columnist. John's fond memories of his childhood dog, Shaun, lead him to agree to Jenny's request for a dog. John is starry-eyed as he remembers how easily Shaun was trained and his excellent behavior. The memories quickly fade as John asks to view the sire and finds himself nearly knocked down by a flurry of yellow fur. John continues to hope that his puppy will not be as rambunctious as this dog.



John's relationship with Marley grows as each of them mature. John is a young, newlywed existing on grand ideas. Marley is a small puppy ready to explore the world. Together they make quite a pair. John's relaxed nature gives him the patience and stamina necessary to keep up with Marley. Endless hours spent repairing and cleaning after Marley could easily wear down another owner. However, John is as full of life as Marley and eager to have a new playmate. Both John and Marley age imperceptibly throughout the story. There is the sense that their devotion to each other helps to keep them young. When John finally realizes that Marley has grown old, it is the first time that the reader thinks of John as being older, despite the knowledge that he has three young children. Marley's vitality has kept both of them young for the past thirteen years.

As John struggles to teach Marley how to be obedient and well-behaved, usually failing miserably, Marley teaches John the importance of living life. Marley staunchly refuses to adhere to society's expectations. John struggles to reign in the mischievous dog, but Marley continues to be himself, showing John that conforming leads to unhappiness. John follows Marley's lessons to do what pleases him in the moment by switching jobs to become a magazine editor and then switching back to writing a newspaper column. John also learns how to love with unbridled passion. Marley's heart is big enough to encompass the entire Grogan family, so that none of them feel any less important. Marley's love also helps the couple through several tough times. John reflects on all Marley's lessons as he sits writing a farewell tribute to the dog. John thought he was purchasing a family pet the day Jenny picked Marley out, but in truth he was getting a lifelong friend and mentor.

## Jenny Grogan

Jenny is a young, active woman intent on starting a family with her new husband. Jenny also works for a newspaper, although later in her life she stays at home with their children. Jenny approaches life with a no-nonsense, must-do attitude. She does not easily give up but is also able to find humor in difficult situations.

Jenny is the one who decides the couple needs a dog. She reasons that a dog will be good practice for a child. As soon as Marley comes home, Jenny assumes the mother role. She meticulously grooms Marley daily for the least sign of fleas. She rises early in the morning to walk him and comes home on her lunch break to exercise and feed him. Marley is the baby Jenny has been craving, and she relishes the opportunity to nurture a living thing. The caring relationship Jenny develops with Marley is reciprocated whenever Jenny suffers emotional pain. Marley senses Jenny's depressed mood after her miscarriage and offers himself up as a shoulder to cry on. When Jenny is placed on bed rest during her third pregnancy, Marley again comes to his mistress's aid by bringing her toys and laying by her side. The bond between Jenny and Marley is tested when Jenny slips into a deep depression after the couple's second child is born. Jenny can barely tolerate Marley's destructive nature and orders him removed from the family - permanently.



In the end Jenny's love for Marley wins out, and the dog is allowed to remain in the home. Jenny's relationship with Marley is secondary to John's friendship with the dog, but Marley does not appear affected by this discrepancy. Marley senses that Jenny's priorities must shift with the birth of the couple's three children. Jenny has sufficiently mothered Marley during his puppyhood, so that he knows she loves him despite her divided attention. Jenny needed Marley to show her that she would be a good, strong mother. Their bond is a silent, yet unbreakable one, that lasts for thirteen years.

## **Miss Dominatrix**

Miss Dominatrix is the name John gives to the instructor of obedience school. She is demanding and not at all understanding. Instead of taking the time to work one on one with John and Marley or offer support to the Grogan's for their hyperactive dog, she kicks Marley out of class after the second week. She appears to resent Marley's boisterous temperament.

## **Lisa**

Lisa is a seventeen-year-old neighbor of John and Jenny's. She lives with her single Mom who works second shift. One night, Lisa is attacked as she sits in her car in her driveway. The attacker stabs Lisa in the ribs but her piercing screams send the criminal running. John is awakened by Lisa's screams, and he and Marley rush outside to see what is going on. John tries to comfort Lisa while they wait for the ambulance. The two have never met before and Lisa only visits the Grogan house once after her recovery.

## **Patrick, Conor, and Colleen Grogan**

Patrick, Conor and Colleen are the children of John and Jenny. Patrick is conceived in Ireland while his parents are on vacation, so his name derives from the place of his conception. Seventeen months later, Conor arrives following a scary pregnancy. Jenny suffers severe cramping at twenty-one weeks and is hospitalized for twelve days while doctors try to stop her contractions. When she is released from the hospital, Jenny is placed on bed rest for the next three months. The day after Jenny is released from bed rest, she experiences cramping again and goes back to the hospital where she delivers a healthy baby boy - Conor. Colleen completes the Grogan children. While most people think that John and Jenny are crazy for having another child after Jenny's difficult second pregnancy, Jenny is overjoyed to have a girl, and John relishes having a daughter.

## **Dr. Jay Butan**

Dr. Jay Butan is the Grogan's veterinarian. He is a compassionate man with a deep understanding of dogs. The Grogan's keep him on speed dial and routinely call him with



off-the-wall questions spurred by some crazy action of Marley's. Dr. Jay remains patient and coaxes the Grogan's through all of Marley's mishaps.

## Digger

Digger is the Grogan's neighbor when they move to Pennsylvania. Digger is a large, burly man who has a heart of gold. His nickname derives from his occupation as an excavator. Digger offers to lend a hand for any earthmoving that John may want done. He also enjoys shooting his gun on Sunday afternoons. The sound of the gun firing drives Marley into a frenzy. Digger becomes a valued neighbor offering support and advice to the Grogan's.

## J.I. Rodale

J.I. Rodale is the founder of the well-known publishing house, Rodale Press. Rodale was a businessman in New York who dealt with electric switches. When his health took a downturn, Rodale altered his lifestyle to a more natural and holistic approach. Rodale's son Robert continued his father's business and lifestyle and turned Rodale Press into the well-known company that it is currently.

## Bob Marley

Bob Marley is not actually a character in the book. John and Jenny do not meet Bob Marley and the book is not about him. But Bob Marley infuses the book and inspires John and Jenny. Both John and Jenny are native mid-Westerners, who are transplanted to South Florida by work. Out of their element, they soon discover the songs and music of Bob Marley. His words greet them at restaurants, fill their home with inspiration, and bring them closer together. When John and Jenny argue about the name of their new puppy, it is Bob Marley's music that soothes the frustration and provides the perfect name for the Grogan's new pet.



## Objects/Places

### The Marley Mambo

Whenever Marley has something in his mouth, he wiggles. The wiggle starts at his head and moves down his body in a wave until his entire body is undulating. John and Jenny call this the Marley Mambo.

### Ireland

John and Jenny take a three-week vacation to Ireland in an attempt to reclaim the spontaneity of their marriage. In one of the many spare bedrooms they stayed in during their visit that their first son, Patrick was conceived.

### Obedience School

When Marley is six-months old, John and Jenny decide to enroll their out-of-control puppy in obedience training. After two sessions, Marley is asked to leave by the prudish instructor. Even puppy school cannot tame this rambunctious animal.

### West Palm Beach

The Grogan's live in West Palm Beach, where John and Jenny bought a small bungalow house that they renovated after getting married.

### Boca Raton

The Grogan's move to Boca Raton when they begin to outgrow their bungalow house. Conor is given a room in the breezeway because there is no room for him in the main house. Boca Raton's yuppie atmosphere does not fit with the Grogan's down-to-earth lifestyle or the impetuous Marley. However, it is closer to John's work and the move makes sense for the family.

### The Indigent Ward

When Jenny gives birth to Patrick, she is scheduled to deliver in a deluxe birthing suite. However, when the Grogan's arrive at the hospital, they find that there is a overpopulation of pregnant women delivering babies. Jenny is given a room in the indigent ward normally reserved for the migrant workers, who cannot afford the luxuries of the regular maternity ward.



## Mangoes

John and Jenny have a mango tree in their backyard at West Palm Beach. Marley loves to eat the fallen fruit, especially the rotten ones which pass through his system leaving even larger piles of poop populating the Grogan's yard.

## Organic Gardening

Organic Gardening can be viewed as a duel item. John takes up gardening as a relaxation technique. Following Jenny's miscarriage, the couple takes every precaution during her second pregnancy, so John begins tending his gardens without the use of pesticides. This love of natural gardening eventually leads him to a job as managing editor for a magazine titled Organic Gardening.

## The Toboggan

When the first snowfall arrives after the Grogan's move to Pennsylvania, the kids are home from school and John takes a day off from work. The children spend the day riding the toboggan down the slope in the front yard. John decides to take a turn while the children warm up by the fire. Just as John begins to slide down the hill, Marley clambers aboard and the two careen wildly down the hill, through the woods, and into the creek at the bottom.

## Pennsylvania

John and Jenny move to Pennsylvania after John accepts a job as editor of a magazine named Organic Gardening. The new environment suits the family well, and the children are excited by the appearance of snow but disappointed by the lack of pencils in Pennsylvania.



# Themes

## Love and Devotion

Dogs have an amazing ability to exhibit an intense love and devotion for their families that is not mimicked by other animals - humans included. There is a pureness to the loyalty shown by dogs that humans are incapable of mirroring, due to their ability to think and judge. Dogs are happy to give their owners unconditional love and ask little in return except food and some play time each day.

Marley is the perfect picture of devotion; however, Marley's boisterous temperament often hides his fierce love for the Grogan's. Even John is skeptical that Marley would rise to the occasion and choose to protect the family over trying to get an intruder to play. Marley's loyalty is nonchalant. He does not make a grand show of his feelings for the Grogan's, but he is there when they need him the most. Marley has an internal sensor that alerts him to the emotions of his owners enabling him to turn down his excitement while providing a head to cry on, a comforting companion, a punching bag or a watchman. As soon as the crisis passes, Marley returns to his happy-go-lucky self.

Many times dogs will show a strong preference for one owner over another, in the case of couples. Marley appears to be completely devoted to both John and Jenny with equal loyalty. However, Marley does show his devotion differently depending on which person he is with at the time. Marley follows John everywhere. Even in his old age, Marley struggles to keep pace with John on walks and to climb the stairs to be with him at night or while John is working. For Jenny Marley provides emotional support. Marley understands that as a male John is more physical, while as a woman Jenny needs a shoulder to cry on and a punching bag where she can release pent up frustrations. Like most dogs, Marley loves his owners with unbridled joy. They are his family, who accept him whole heartedly for who he is, and he can do no less than accept them for who they are.

## Growing Up

Everyone longs to stay young for as long as possible. There is the desire to be Peter Pan and live in Neverland forever chasing pirates and Indians. Owning a dog gives people the opportunity to hold onto their childhood just a little longer. A puppy's boundless energy often wears an adult to exhaustion, but it is an exhilarating tiredness that reminds the owner what being young feels like.

If an exuberant puppy is the secret to eternal childhood, then with the addition of Marley, the Grogan's have found the Fountain of Youth. For twelve years, Marley keeps John and Jenny on their toes caring for him. Jenny ages slightly faster than John. This difference can be accounted for by her role as mother. Although John is a father, there seems to be something about mother's that requires them to act more reserved and



proper, while Dad is able to remain the jokester and playmate longer. John is not irresponsible in his parenting duties, but the reader should remember that John, not Jenny, flew recklessly down a hill on a toboggan with a nearly hundred pound Labrador perched on his chest.

John is hit as suddenly as Marley with the knowledge that he has grown up. At some undetermined point, John and Marley pass into adulthood. John has settled into a secure job that he likes but does not enjoy. Marley's failing health awakens John and prompts him to switch jobs. Marley shows John that life is too short to spend it doing something unfulfilling. Marley's entire life has been spent rushing headlong through screens in order to get outside to something new, pulling tables after other dogs and taste testing everything he can find. Marley lived according to his own rules, adopting basic social graces only out of deference to his owners, and he can lay down to his final sleep happy that he has lived a full life. Marley continued to follow his loved ones around and seek the perfect potty spot right up to the very end. Never once did Marley fully resign himself to old age and lay down before the fire. Growing up does not mean giving up the things one enjoys.

## Master and Beast

In Chapter Seven, John struggles to establish himself as Marley's master. In typical human ideology, man is the owner meant to teach the pet. However, Marley turns this idea around in his own subtle way. John does not realize that Marley is teaching him important life lessons until he sits back to reflect on Marley's life. In the end, John comes to understand that what most people view as Marley's inability to behave is really his zest for life, refusing to be repressed. Marley is not content to lie quietly in the garage while life passes him by. Instead Marley chases after poodles that catch his eye, eats ripe mangoes until he is sick and greets visitors with unabashed joy. If everyone lived the way that Marley does, they would be able to have more experiences and fewer regrets.

John loves his job as a newspaper columnist but on a whim applies, and receives, a position with a magazine. At the time John's decision makes sense for the family. The new job moves them to a quieter, safer community and provides enough income for Jenny to stay home full-time with the couple's three children. However, after several years with the magazine, John longs for the fast-paced freedom of writing his own column. He misses the interaction with his readers and the ability to write his own stories. It is Marley's advancing age that prompts John to switch jobs again and return to column writing. Marley shows John that life is too short to not follow your dreams.

Without realizing it, John has become Marley's student for some very important life lessons. John may have taught Marley how to sit, heel and stop jumping up on people, but Marley is the better teacher. Marley teaches with patience and through modeling the actions he wishes others to know. Marley is a natural teacher living by his own lessons and acting out of the pureness of his huge heart.



# Style

## Perspective

John Grogan writes as though he is writing in the moment rather than from the perspective of memory. Marley has clearly touched the Grogan's life in a huge way, so that his presence is felt long after he is gone. Marley comes into John and Jenny's life while they are a young couple just learning how to navigate life together and contemplating their future. The maturation of the couple's relationship is reflected in Marley's growth. The change is subtle. John does not realize that his impression of Marley has changed until Marley is twelve years old. The reader, too, is unaware of the change in perspective until John mentions it. John writes with the same force of life that Marley outwardly exhibits.

The reader initially assumes that John chose to write about Marley to showcase the worst dog ever. However, after reading the entire book it is obvious that John wrote to honor the memory of a great friend. Marley is not a bad dog and certainly does not come close to being the world's worst dog. He is high strung and lively, but his best quality is his undying love for the Grogan family. This is the message of the book. John writes to convey the lesson that Marley taught him.

## Tone

John Grogan tells the story of his life with Marley from a purely subjective point of view. It is impossible for John to step back from the situation and view Marley through an objective lens. The subjectivity of the author does not lessen the reality of the book and, in fact, works to enhance the truth of Marley's adventures. John brings Marley fully to life so the reader groans and laughs along with John and Jenny as Marley horrifies and excites them.

John Grogan writes with full emotion that is not lost on the reader. The openness and honesty with which John writes appears to be a direct result of his life with Marley. Marley's personality is so strong that his traits overflow and infuse those around him. John does not come to realize this until the end of Marley's life, but the effect is found throughout the book. Marley is an odd mixture of boisterousness and calmness. He appears to have an internal sensor that allows him to tune into the needs of those around him. Marley speaks through his actions and he speaks loudest during the moments that he is comforter and protector. The reader gets the sense that John is writing the story for Marley because the dog is incapable of doing it himself. John may be the writer, but Marley is the author.

## Structure

Marley and Me contains a Preface and twenty-nine chapters. Each chapter is numbered and given a title that describes what the chapter is about. The titles intrigue and humor the reader. In the Preface, the author provides a bit of personal background information to set the stage for the rest of the book.

John Grogan's writing style is clear and concise. He tells the story in warm language that draws the reader deep into the story of John's life with Marley. The chapters fly by as the reader eagerly hurries to find out what Marley has done next. The fast-paced movement of the book reflects the growth of Marley from puppy to elderly dog. Throughout the entire story the reader is struck by Marley's zest for life and quiet devotion. The reader relates easily to the story and is reminded of his own treasured memories of a favorite pet.



## Quotes

"Kill a plant, buy a puppy. Well, of course it made perfect sense." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"His body would quiver, his head would bob from side to side, and his entire rear end would swing in a sort of spastic dance. We called it he Marley Mambo." Chapter 4, pg. 25

"We wouldn't realize it until years later, but he showed early signs of that condition that would later be coined to describe the behavior of thousands of hard-to-control, ants-in-their-pants schoolchildren. Our puppy had a textbook case of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder." Chapter 4, pg. 27

"Our rambunctious, wired dog stood with his shoulders between Jenny's knees, his big, blocky head resting quietly in her lap." Chapter 6, pg. 49

"Ireland was a coast-to-coast No Sex Zone. And that was all the invitation I needed. We spent the trip bopping like bunnies." Chapter 10, pg. 88

"He was a gentle giant around Patrick, and he accepted his second-fiddle status with bonhomie and good-natured resignation." Chapter 12, pg. 109

"The sight of Marley so uncharacteristically guarding us like that, so majestically fierce, brought tears to my eyes. Man's best friend? Damn straight he was." Chapter 13, pg. 119

"Even on the worst days, we usually managed to find something to smile over, knowing by now what every parent sooner or later figures out, that these wondrous days of early parenthood - of diapered bottoms and first teeth and incomprehensible jabber - are but a brilliant, brief flash in the vastness of an otherwise ordinary lifetime." Chapter 19, pg. 186

"From below our feet, deep in the bowels of the plane, came a sound, muffled but undeniable. It was pitifully mournful sound, a sort of primal call that started low and rose as it went. Oh, dear Jesus, he's down there howling." Chapter 21, pg. 214

"Without us quite realizing it, our eternal puppy had become a senior citizen." Chapter 22, pg. 225

"He was old; he was deaf; he was beyond reform. I wasn't going to change him." Chapter 23, pg. 235

"Age sneaks up on us all, but it sneaks up on a dog with a swiftness that is both breathtaking and sobering." Chapter 24, pg. 237

"If this was Marley's time, then it was his time, and we would see to it he went out with dignity and without suffering." Chapter 25, pg. 254



"There was something I had never told him, that no one ever had. I wanted him to hear it before he went. 'Marley,' I said. 'You are a great dog.'" Chapter 27, pg. 271

"Despite everything, all the disappointments and unmet expectations, Marley had given us a gift, at once priceless and free. He taught us the art of unqualified love. How to give it, how to accept it." Chapter 29, pg. 287



## Topics for Discussion

John and Jenny find comfort in Bab Marley's music and the musician provides the inspiration for Marley's name. Discuss how music can become a theme for a person's life using examples from the book.

Miss Dominatrix is devoid of understanding for the difficulties Marley poses for John and Jenny. How could a different mindset on the part of the trainer have altered Marley's behavior earlier in life? Could a successful obedience school have prevented Jenny from becoming overly frustrated with Marley following Conor's birth?

When Jenny is put on bed rest during Conor's birth, she sinks into a deep depression. What do you think brings on this depression? Do you feel it could be related to the miscarriage before Patrick was born?

Both John and Jenny have very fond memories of childhood pets, which prompt them to get a pet of their own. Do you feel that Marley grows to fit the ideal image of a pet held by the Grogan's, or does he surpass those fond memories to truly become the ideal pet?

How does the move from South Florida to Pennsylvania alter the family dynamic?

Marley's temperament remains unchanged throughout his life even as his body ages. How does Marley's steadfastness bring John and Jenny closer together as a couple?

Remember your own favorite pet and discuss how its presence affected your own life.

Do you see any potential problems that may arise from getting another dog that looks exactly like Marley?