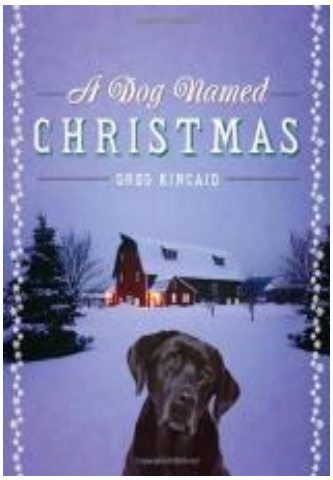
A Dog Named Christmas

by Greg Kincaid



About the Book

Todd McCray is a developmentally challenged young man living with his parents on their Kansas farm. While listening to the radio one day, Todd hears that the local animal shelter is seeking temporary homes for dogs during the Christmas week; Todd immediately wants to participate. Once Todd wins over his reluctant father, George, the McCray family find themselves with Christmas, a loyal, obedient dog that weaves his way into the hearts of the McCray family and their friends. When the time comes to give Christmas back however, it is George who finds he is having a hard time letting go.

Discussion Guide

1. The book opens with the reader learning about Christmas?s previous family, the Conners (who knew him as Jake). We learn that Jake is a rover and that, as Mr. Conner puts it, he always has ?Jake business to attend to? (3). Why do you think the author decided to introduce the reader to Christmas while he was still Jake?

2. When talking about Christmas in the opening pages, the author writes, ?Hardship was the patina of his [Christmas?s] good life. There is no better state of mind for man or animal than being what you are and doing what you are meant to do.? (4).What do you think Christmas is ?meant to do??

3. In the novel, Todd?s father, George, speaks about the two previous dogs he had in his life: Tucker and Good Charlie. Discuss them both. At what point in his life did he have each of them? Why were they important to him at those times? How do these two dogs affect George?s relationship with Christmas?

4. Discuss George McCray?s statement that ?It?s important to have a few choice spots for sitting and thinking, places that resonated with good memories and ample privacy? (59). Where is George?s spot and why did he choose that particular place? What does he contemplate while there? What happens to his spot at the end of the book? Why?

5. When Christmas arrives, George finds himself enjoying his company despite his struggle with the memories of Tucker and Good Charlie. Why doesn?t George talk to his wife, Mary Ann, about his feelings?

6. At Christmas dinner George interrupts the merriment to remind everyone that when the holiday is over, the dog named Christmas goes back. How does the family react? How does George react to his own comment? Do you think he acted reasonably?

7. Discuss some of the ways that George attempts to distance himself from the joy that Christmas brings to his family, his friends and, most importantly, to him. Why do you think he repeatedly attempts to internally sabotage his own happiness with Christmas?

8. Discuss this statement: ?Adults need keep their promises, even when they become inconvenient. Adults have to learn that things can be good without being forever.? (80) Do you agree with George? Why or why not? Do you feel there are moments when it is acceptable to break a promise?

9. Why do you think that George wants Todd to learn that ?there is seldom room at our own inn for others?? (94) What does this say about George? How does this affect Todd? Does George?s thinking change by the end of the book? If so, how?

10. Bill Conner comments that people do not pick out Jake (Christmas) and own him. Rather, it is Jake who has to pick who he wants to be with. What made him pick George McCray?

11. George starts the book looking back on his life and reflecting on one memorable Christmas season, ?a holiday that seemed perfect.? (7) What was it that made this holiday so good for George? What was the ?Christmas? message of the book?

12. As George struggles to determine the right thing to do for Todd, he comments that sometimes the important things we do for our children will ?not be given but withheld.? What does the author mean?

Author Bio

Greg Kincaid is a practicing lawyer whose emphasis is Divorce and Family Law Mediation. He is a Fellow in the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, a member of the Family Law Bench Bar Committee of the Johnson County Bar Association, a former Barrister in the Earl O'Conner Inns of Court and a member of the Kansas Bar Association. Mr. Kincaid helped to start the Changing Lives through Literature Program and has served as the Chairman of the Optimist Oratory Contest for the last seven years. He lives on a farm in western Johnson County with his wife, five children, and two dogs.

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