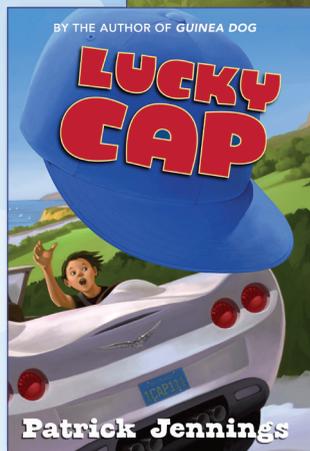
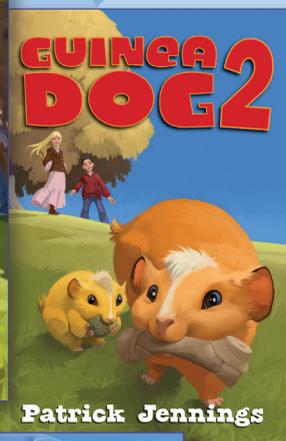
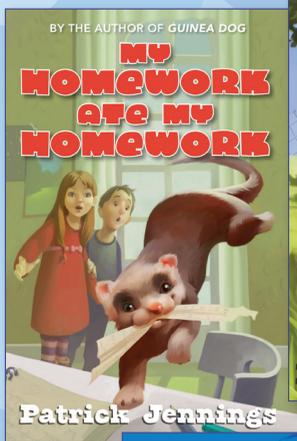
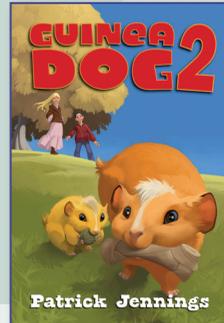
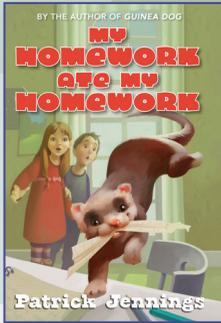


# Egmont USA Author Study:

## Patrick Jennings

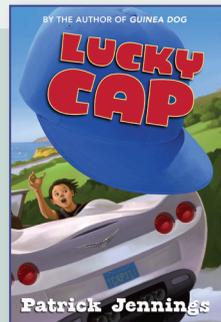


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## About the Books

Reminiscent of James Howe and Louis Sachar and written in crisp language rich with preteen characterization, Patrick Jennings's novels make excellent choices for author studies. Use this guide to become familiar with the author and use his books to discuss themes of family, friendship, animals, and popularity.





## About the Author

Patrick Jennings was born in Indiana and grew up surrounded by kids. With six siblings and many childhood friends, he was never at a loss for companionship. In middle school he did a lot of babysitting for his nieces and nephews and loved making up games and stories to entertain them.

Jennings knew from an early age that he wanted to be a teacher, partially because he loved his own teachers so much, but also because he loves books and enjoys working with children. He pursued art education in college but soon discovered that art was not a public-school priority. He realized in graduate school that preschool curriculum is mostly art-based and found his niche: preschool teaching in San Francisco, Mexico, and Arizona over an eight-year period. It was during this time that he rediscovered his love for children's books and realized that he could connect two of his great loves—kids and stories—through writing.

Jennings was teaching in the morning and working in the afternoon in the local library when he wrote his first novel. He revised it on the library's public computers after hours and even cataloged the book when it was published, shelved it, and checked it out to patrons. He resigned from teaching and working as a librarian after he signed a contract for his fourth book.

Jennings's stories are similar to several of his childhood favorites — novels by E.B. White, Roald Dahl, and Beverly Cleary. Jennings describes his novels, like these classics, as “funny stories about real kids with families and friends and teachers and pets. Some of those stories had fantasy elements — a spider who could write, a giant peach, a mouse who rode a motorcycle — but the stories always occurred in the real world. This is an apt description of many of my stories.”

In describing his writing process, Jennings points out that he likes to complete a rough draft quickly so that he doesn't lose track of tone or rhythm. “Generally,” he says, “I like to finish a rough draft within four to six weeks, so I choose a month when I have fewer engagements. Then comes the revision process, which I happen to love. I enjoy watching a story go from awkward to steady, from coarse to fine.”

In giving writing advice to young people, he says, “The most important thing to do is read.” Jennings regularly hosts writing groups for young writers and all attendees read voraciously. “Their writing reflects it,” he says. Writers first emulate other authors. “Reading is akin to a painter studying the masters. Writing is trying to paint

in the style of the masters. I've found most kids have a built-in desire to tell stories. Every kid who attends group regularly loves to write. Some write voluminously; a few have completed novels. They face mechanical challenges—spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure, etc., but if they keep their eyes on the story in front of them, those challenges become necessary tools they don't resist learning. So I suggest writers read and write; I say don't be afraid to make mistakes, don't avoid learning new things, remain curious, and have fun—that's my advice."

There have been many highs in Jennings's career and he names just a few: visiting thousands of young readers and writers all across the country; publishing his stories; and working with incredibly talented, dedicated, and friendly people. "There have been so many highs," he says, "that the lows barely register."

Jennings currently lives and writes in Port Townsend on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State with his family and often visits schools, where he presents and leads workshops for young writers. He enjoys working with student audiences of all sizes and admits that his favorite part is Q & A, which he always includes. His main goal, he says, "is to inspire kids to view writing as the exciting experience I believe it to be." He misses teaching and working in the library, but participating in school author visits provides him time to interact with young people and books and book lovers in a variety of settings. He says, "I feel as if I am 'talking' to them as I write my stories. So it's all worked out beautifully."

# Recurring Themes



## Family

### **Guinea Dog**

Characterize Rufus's parents. How are they alike? How are they different? Why does his father not want Rufus to have a dog? Why does his mother bring home a guinea pig? What reactions do Rufus and his father have to it?

Rufus's father has his own worries. What work-related struggle does he have and how does he resolve it by the end of the story? How does his struggle influence the family?

### **Lucky Cap**

Describe Enzo's family. What new job does his father acquire and how does it impact the family? Describe Enzo and his father's summer trip. How does Enzo change over the summer and what changes have occurred at home during his absence? How are he and his father received by the rest of the family upon returning? Is his father worried about the changes? Why or why not?

When Enzo begins his first year of middle school, why does his older sister, Lupe, who attends the same school, keep her distance from Enzo? Does she do so for good reason? Explain your answer.

Characterize Enzo's sister Nadine. How is she different from Enzo's other sisters? Why does Enzo go to her room to talk? Does she give him good advice? Explain.

### **Dognap\***

Describe Logan's relationship with his mother. Is she a patient parent? Explain. How would she characterize her son? Does she take his investigation seriously?

In what way might Logan's mother have more responsibility than many mothers? Who is Sloane and how does Logan respond to him?

### **My Homework Ate My Homework**

Describe Zaritza's relationship with her father. What common interest and creative gene do they share? How does her mother view Zaritza's talent? How do her parents respond to her poor performance in math? Which parent is more likely to "draw the line" in terms of completing school assignments? Support your answer with evidence from the story.



\* Previously published as *Invasion of the Dognappers*



## Friendship

### Guinea Dog

Describe Rufus and Murphy's friendship. Why is Rufus jealous of Murphy? Should he be? Why or why not? How are Rufus and Murphy alike? How are they different? Is Murphy a good friend? Support your answers with evidence from the story.

Why does Rufus's mother encourage a friendship between Rufus and Lurena? What reaction does Rufus have to his mother's interest in Lurena and why?

### Lucky Cap

Enzo and Kai have been best friends forever. However, when both begin middle school, Enzo distances himself from Kai. Why does Enzo refuse to recognize his friendship with Kai? Is he right to do so? What does Enzo's behavior indicate about his character? Does Kai understand Enzo's behavior?

Who are Chase and Lance and how does Enzo meet them? Why does Enzo want to be accepted by the "athletic boys" at school?

Who is Analisa and how is she different from the other girls Enzo meets at his new school? Does she prove to be a true friend? Explain.

### **Dognap\***

Identify Logan's closest friends. Who takes his story about dogs disappearing the most seriously? Why are his friends skeptical?

How do Logan's friends organize as a team to find the dognapper? What do they call their organization? How do his friends help him in the end?

Who is Darius and why is his father upset with Logan? Is his father's anger justified? Explain.

### **My Homework Ate My Homework**

Zaritza dreams of playing the lead role in a school play; however, her teacher, Mr. O, refuses to allow her to participate unless she improves in math. Describe her first impressions of Eden, her math tutor. How does Zaritza's relationship with Eden change throughout the course of the novel and why? Is Zaritza a good friend? Explain.



\* Previously published as *Invasion of the Dognappers*



## Animals

### **Guinea Dog**

Describe Rufus's first reactions to the guinea pig his mother brings home. Why does Rufus name her Fido? How does Rufus's attitude toward Fido change over time and why? How does Fido get Rufus in trouble? What special talents does Fido have that make her unique? What do Rufus's friends think of Fido and why?

### **Lucky Cap**

Who is Ink and what happens to him while Enzo is vacationing with his dad? How does Enzo feel about the change? Ink is not a major character in the story; however, he does play an important role. How so? For example what does he tell us about Rufus's home life? How does the writer use him to create humor?

## **Dognap\***

A number of dogs appear in *Dognap*. Logan owns Bubba, an aging bloodhound. Kian's family owns Chloe, a pint-size Yorkie, Aggy has Festus, and Thatcher has Bear. Several additional characters have pets as well. Each pet is well loved by its owner. Identify one dog that goes missing and explain its owner's reaction when the animal goes missing and returns.

Review the dogs in the story. Could any one dog be left out of the story without changing the plot? Why or why not? Describe an additional scene that could be added to the story that would include one of the dogs.

How do Logan and his friends solve the mystery of the missing dogs? How do they get the dogs back with their original owners?

## **My Homework Ate My Homework**

Who is Bandito and why is Zaritza in charge of caring for him? Describe Zaritza's reaction(s) to Bandito when she is first assigned to care for him. What happens that changes Zaritza's attitude toward Bandito?



\* Previously published as *Invasion of the Dognappers*



## Popularity

### **Guinea Dog**

Who is Dmitri? Identify several places in the story where Dmitri teases Rufus. Why does Dmitri tease Rufus and how does Rufus respond to him? Does Dmitri want Rufus to feel bad? Why or why not? How does Murphy treat Dmitri? Is Dmitri a likeable person? Support your response with evidence from the story.

### **Lucky Cap**

Enzo begins middle school knowing that it will have its challenges. First and foremost, he believes he must belong to the “in” crowd. How does he set out to establish his identity? What contributes to his unexpected popularity? What happens when he loses his cap? Did his cap make him popular? Support your answer with evidence from the story.

Chase is a newfound friend; however, Lance (Chase’s friend) does not readily accept Enzo. Why?

## **Dognap\***

When Logan first explains seeing a dog disappear, what reaction does he get from his friends at school?

Is Logan a popular kid? What makes him admirable? How would he respond to being pushed around by a school bully?

## **My Homework Ate My Homework**

Zaritza expects to earn the lead role in the school play; however, she is stunned when she is given a minor part. Why does she not get the lead? How does this turn of events impact her popularity and her behavior? How does it impact the perceptions others have of her? Eden is given the leading part. How does this impact Eden and the perceptions her classmates have of her?



\* Previously published as *Invasion of the Dognappers*

## Common Core Extension Activities

(Activities can be applied to any Jennings novel)

- Using a computer, summarize a memorable scene or chapter from a Jennings novel. Share your rough draft in a peer conference and revise and edit the piece as needed. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.5 & ELA-Literacy.W.5.5)
- Write a paragraph in which you describe a key character from a favorite Jennings novel. Use at least two transition phrases (e.g., *for instance*, *also*, *in addition*) to introduce examples that support your paragraph's theme. Make sure you include a concluding statement. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.1 & ELA-Literacy.W.5.1)
- Identify two favorite characters from one story (or from two separate stories) and write a dialogue between them. The dialogue should in some way be illustrative of that person's character. For example, Rufus's dad (from *Guinea Dog*) does not like dogs in the house; Zaritza (*My Homework Ate My Homework*) doesn't like ferrets. A dialogue between the two might show their attitudes toward these animals. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3 & ELA-Literacy.W.5.3)
- Identify an animal you would be interested in having as a new pet. Using at least two sources, one from the Internet and another that is in print, write a one-page summary explaining how to care for this new pet. For example, what type of environment will it need to have to live well, what food does it need, and what steps will you need to take to ensure its well-being? (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.6; Literacy.W.4.7; & ELA-Literacy.W.5.6; Literacy.W.5.7)

## Awards and Honors

2012-2013 Kansas William Allen White  
Children's Book Award Winner

2011 Washington State Scanduzzi Children's Book Award Winner

2012-2013 Massachusetts Children's Book Award Honor

2012-2013 Florida Sunshine Readers Book Award Master List

2011-2012 Colorado Children's Book Award Nominee

2011-2012 New Hampshire Great Stone Face  
Book Award Master List

2013-2014 Washington State Sasquatch Book Award Master List

2013-2014 Hawaii Nene Book Award Master List

2011-2012 Texas's Cy-Fair Horned Toad Tales List

## Praise

### Guinea Dog

"Nothing short of divine." —*Betsy Bird, A Fuse #8 Production Blog*

"It's hilarious. It's about this boy who really wants a dog, but he gets a guinea pig who acts totally like a dog. That's why it's called *Guinea Dog*.' There you have it, straight from my six-year-old's mouth." —*GeekDad, Wired Magazine*

"Early chapter book readers will enjoy this humorous tale."  
—*School Library Journal*

### Dognap\*

"This is a good choice for readers, even reluctant ones, who like humor, mystery, and science fiction all rolled into one."  
—*School Library Journal*

"There is enough action and adventure to move the plot along as well as many elements children will appreciate: mystery; flatulence humor; kids saving the day; short, manageable chapters; and so on. Even reluctant readers will stay engaged and hope for more capers from the ICRU." —*Booklist*

### My Homework Ate My Homework

"Full of humor." —*Booklist*

"An amusing, fast-paced tale about an irrepressible drama."  
—*Kirkus Reviews*

\* Previously published as *Invasion of the Dognappers*

## Book List

*Guinea Dog (2010).*

New York: Egmont USA. HC 978-1-60684-053-5 \$15.99 •  
PB 978-1-60684-153-2 \$6.99 \* e-Book 978-1-60684-327-7 \$6.99

*Lucky Cap (2011).*

New York: Egmont USA. HC 978-1-60684-054-2 \$15.99 •  
PB 978-1-60684-306-2 \$6.99 \* e-Book 978-1-60684-275-1 \$6.99

*Invasion of the Dognappers (2012).*

New York: Egmont USA. HC 978-1-60684-287-4 \$15.99

*Dognap\** (2013).

New York: Egmont USA. PB 978-1-60684-443-4 \$6.99 •  
e-Book 978-1-60684-530-1 \$6.99

*My Homework Ate My Homework (2013).*

New York: Egmont USA. HC 978-1-60684-286-7 \$15.99 •  
e-Book 978-1-60684-288-1 \$15.99

*Guinea Dog 2 (2013).*

New York: Egmont USA. HC 978-1-60684-452-6 \$15.99 •  
e-Book 978-1-60684-453-3 \$15.99

\* Previously published as *Invasion of the Dognappers*

Visit <http://www.patrickjennings.com/> to follow the latest on Patrick Jennings and his novels.

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