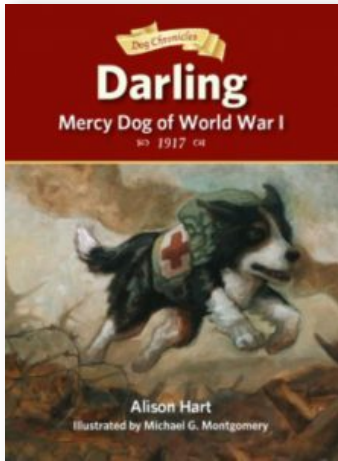


PEACHTREE  
**TEACHER'S GUIDE**

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## Darling, Mercy Dog of World War I

Written by Alison Hart | Illustrated by Michael G. Montgomery

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Ages 7–10  
AR • Lexile • F&P • GRL V; Gr 5

### ABOUT THE BOOK

At home in England, Darling is a mischievous yet much loved pet to Robert and Katherine. But when the British military asks families to volunteer their dogs to help the war effort, they send Darling off to be trained, even though it is very hard to say goodbye. Darling goes through training along with many other dogs and ultimately serves as a mercy dog, seeking out injured soldiers on the battlefield and leading the medics to them. After saving the lives of numerous soldiers, Darling is faced with a major challenge.

### THEMES

Sacrifice | Loyalty | Bravery | Dogs in war  
World War I | European History

### ACTIVITY WORKSHEETS

The following activity worksheets are included in this guide:

- Vocabulary Word Match
- Research and Writing Assignment

### AFTER YOU READ

Use the following excerpts from the book as post-reading discussion questions.

- **Robert led me over to the bulletin. It showed a dog standing proudly on a hill. Bombs blasted behind him. “See Darling? That German shepherd is a soldier.” [...] “They don’t call them German shepherds anymore,” Mister Crispin said. “They**

**call them Alsatisans. On account of us hating the Huns since the war started.” (p. 20)**

- How do you think people from England would respond to a bulletin like this? How about people from Germany?
- Why do you think posters like this existed?
- Why do you think everyday names like “German shepherd” were changed during wartime?
- **“The French Armies use dogs, and the British are training them, too. Messenger dogs are smart and swift. Sentry dogs are keen and brave. Darling would be fine at either.” (p. 22)**
  - Why would the armies use dogs for the war effort?
  - What traits do dogs have that would help soldiers on the Front?
  - What other ways would dogs be helpful during wartime?
  - What are some of the pros and cons of having dogs on the Front?
- **“I know this will be hard for you and your sister, but the dog tax has gone up to ten shillings, and we can no longer afford to keep her. I have written Mister Seligman, the area recruitment officer. He will be coming round to the house to pick up [...] Darling.” (p. 22–23)**
  - What is the reasoning behind charging a dog tax?
  - Why would the father sign Darling up for the war effort?
  - Can you argue for and against this decision?

- What would you do in this situation?
- **“Darling ’ere brought us,” Private Kent said. “She’s no messenger dog, that’s a fact. She came in dead last. But might it be she ’as a different calling?” [...] “I’ve heard they’re training mercy dogs. Dogs that ’elp find the wounded.” (p. 50)**
  - What characteristics would make a good messenger dog? A good mercy dog?
  - Explain why Darling would make a good mercy dog and not a good messenger dog.
  - Why would dogs like Beast be better messenger dogs? What descriptions/characteristics of Beast or examples of his actions would show that he is a good messenger dog?
- **“We should’ve had a tank at the War Dog School,” Private Carlton said. “To get the dogs used to the sight.”**

*Unafraid, Beast lunged for a clanking track as it rolled past, churning up the earth.*

*“The dogs will soon be seeing things that no one can train them for.” Sergeant Hanson frowned. “Let’s hope they stay true.” (p. 62)*

  - How do you think you would feel seeing a big machine like a tank for the first time?
  - Why does Private Carlton wish they had a tank at the War Dog School?
  - Why does Sergeant Hanson frown? What does he mean when he says, “the dogs will soon be seeing things that no one can train them for”?
  - What kinds of things do you think the dogs will see in war that they could not be trained for?
- **Private Kent knelt beside me. “Take a good look, lass,” he said. “There’s the enemy.”**

*I stared at the prisoners, wanting to growl. But then I saw how worn and dazed they looked. And when I studied their faces, I saw that the two hated Germans were just boys, not much older than Robert.” (p. 78)*

  - How does Darling feel about the German soldiers?
  - Why do Private Kent and Darling have such different reactions to the German prisoners?
  - How would you react to the prisoners if you were in that situation?
- **I had never heard Private Kent speak so long—and so solemnly. I laid my head on his knee and he ran his fingers through my fur. “You’re the best partner a bloke could ask for,” he said, speaking low as if he didn’t want anyone else to hear. “I just wanted to tell you in case...” His voice broke. (p. 107)**
  - How does Private Kent feel about Darling? Why?
  - What do Kent’s feelings toward Darling say about his character?
  - Why would Kent’s feelings toward Darling be a disadvantage for him?
- **I left Beast to his meat and bread and went over to Tweed. We sniffed each other, and I could feel her nervousness. The searching had been hard on the Airedale. Her toenails were chipped and her eyes were dull. When she wasn’t working, she paced in front of her crate, wearing a path in the earth. Even liver treats from Private Reeves didn’t soothe her. (p. 108)**
  - Compare and contrast Tweed’s character and personality with Darling’s. Why would they both be mercy dogs?
  - Why do you think Tweed is acting this way?
  - Compare and contrast Tweed’s reaction to the Front to Darling’s.
  - Tweed is nervous about the Front. Identify some of the other emotions the characters have toward their situation.
- **I went back to digging. The burning in my shoulder spread until my body was wracked with tremors, but I couldn’t quit. (p. 123)**
  - Even though Darling is wounded, she still helps save Tweed and other soldiers. Why would she do this?
  - What does this say about Darling’s character and her role as a mercy dog?
  - Are there any other characters that put themselves in danger to help others?
- **Then the sergeant pulled a stool over to Private Kent’s bedside. “I found out that Darling was on the list of animals deemed unfit. She was to be destroyed today,” he explained. “I had to figure out a way to save her.” (p. 147)**
  - What does Hanson’s decision to save Darling say about his character? Could he get in trouble for this?
  - What can the soldiers’ reactions say about the war in general?
  - How do you think the people back home in England will react to the story of Darling in the newspaper?
  - How do you think Darling’s life at home will change after her time in the war?

## REVIEWS

“While never shying away from the tragedies of battle, Darling’s story focuses on bravery, sacrifice and devotion.... Wartime adventure with plenty of heart.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Descriptions of life on the Belgian front carry weight. Montgomery’s soft pencil drawings reinforce the affection between Darling and her handlers, and back matter offers additional facts about WWI and military dogs.”  
—*Publishers Weekly*

## AWARDS

- Delaware Diamonds (nominee, 3–5) —Diamond State Reading Association
- Golden Sower Award (nominee, intermediate) —Nebraska Library Association
- Kansas State Reading Circle Recommended Reading List (starred, intermediate) —Kansas National Education Association

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alison Hart is the author of more than sixty books for young readers, including *Emma’s River*, *Anna’s Blizzard*, the *Racing to Freedom* trilogy, and the *Dog Chronicles* series. Hart is a former teacher and lives in Virginia.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Michael G. Montgomery has illustrated numerous children’s books. He attended Georgia Southern University and the University of Georgia. Montgomery lives in Georgia.

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Teacher’s Guide  
prepared by Elyse Vincenty

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updated 3/25/20



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## VOCABULARY WORD MATCH

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| _____ <b>Tank</b>           | A. Projectiles like bullets and shells fired from a weapon                        |
| _____ <b>Trench</b>         | B. Large guns, such as cannons and howitzers                                      |
| _____ <b>Front line</b>     | C. The jagged wire hung in no man's land that can trap and hurt enemies           |
| _____ <b>Artillery</b>      | D. The command for messenger dogs to run and deliver a message                    |
| _____ <b>Casualty</b>       | E. The term for someone missing, wounded, or killed in battle                     |
| _____ <b>Zero hour</b>      | F. Darling's hometown with Katherine and Robert                                   |
| _____ <b>Ration</b>         | G. The trench closest to the enemy  |
| _____ <b>Machine-gun</b>    | H. A special gun able to fire many bullets in a matter of seconds                 |
| _____ <b>Begone</b>         | I. The special award Darling gets for saving everyone                             |
| _____ <b>Mercy dog</b>      | J. Darling's role at the Front  |
| _____ <b>Barbed wire</b>    | K. The name of the place where the battle happens                                 |
| _____ <b>No man's land</b>  | L. The ruined land between the British and German trenches                        |
| _____ <b>Wounded</b>        | M. The top edge of a trench   |
| _____ <b>Poison gas</b>     | N. Dangerous chemicals released as a gas that would injure or kill enemy soldiers |
| _____ <b>Messines Ridge</b> | O. A fixed amount of a particular item allowed to each person                     |
| _____ <b>Cosham</b>         | P. A large armored vehicle fit with cannons and machine guns                      |
| _____ <b>Tommy</b>          | Q. A nickname for the British soldiers (hint: it is also a boy's first name)      |
| _____ <b>Medal</b>          | R. Long and narrow man-made ditches where soldiers lived and fought in the war    |
| _____ <b>Ammunition</b>     | S. The word for a hurt soldier  |
| _____ <b>Parapet</b>        | T. The name for when the British attack the Germans on Messines Ridge             |

## VOCABULARY WORD MATCH

### ANSWERS

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| __P__ Tank           | A. Projectiles like bullets and shells fired from a weapon                        |
| __R__ Trench         | B. Large guns, such as cannons and howitzers                                      |
| __G__ Front line     | C. The jagged wire hung in no man's land that can trap and hurt enemies           |
| __B__ Artillery      | D. The command for messenger dogs to run and deliver a message                    |
| __E__ Casualty       | E. The term for someone missing, wounded, or killed in battle                     |
| __T__ Zero hour      | F. Darling's hometown with Katherine and Robert                                   |
| __O__ Ration         | G. The trench closest to the enemy  |
| __H__ Machine-gun    | H. A special gun able to fire many bullets in a matter of seconds                 |
| __D__ Begone         | I. The special award Darling gets for saving everyone                             |
| __J__ Mercy dog      | J. Darling's role at the front  |
| __C__ Barbed wire    | K. The name of the place where the battle happens                                 |
| __L__ No man's land  | L. The ruined land between the British and German trenches                        |
| __S__ Wounded        | M. The top edge of a trench   |
| __N__ Poison gas     | N. Dangerous chemicals released as a gas that would injure or kill enemy soldiers |
| __K__ Messines Ridge | O. A fixed amount of a particular item allowed to each person                     |
| __F__ Cosham         | P. A large armored vehicle fit with cannons and machine guns                      |
| __Q__ Tommy          | Q. A nickname for the British soldiers (hint: it is also a boy's first name)      |
| __I__ Medal          | R. Long and narrow man-made ditches where soldiers lived and fought in the war    |
| __A__ Ammunition     | S. The word for a hurt soldier  |
| __M__ Parapet        | T. The name for when the British attack the Germans on Messines Ridge             |

## RESEARCH and WRITING ASSIGNMENT

**RESEARCH** one or more of the topics below and write an informative essay examining the chosen subject. Use citations, developed facts, and details in the piece. Report on the topic by presenting original ideas, opinions, and how the topic enhanced the plot.

### TOPIC LIST:

- Dogs in wartime
- Life in the trenches
- Propaganda of World War I
- Battle of Messines Ridge
- Weapons of World War I
- War medicine
- Belgium in World War I
- No man's land and trench warfare
- *The Home Front*
- Britain and World War I
- Prisoners of War in World War I
- Causes of World War I

**DISCUSS** the point of view in *Darling, Mercy Dog of World War I*. Notice how the setting, physical details, emotional responses, and overall theme are presented from a dog's perspective—more specifically—a war dog. Consider the research required to create a believable tale, such as *Darling, Mercy Dog of World War I*, as seen and experienced from a dog's point of view.

**WRITE** a narrative piece from the point of view of Beast, Tweed, or Rag. Consider how each of these characters had a different experience than Darling. Choose a scene from the book in which the animal is featured. Include other characters in the scene. Use dialogue and description to reveal the animal's character and role in the scene, making certain to keep the perspective in your story close to the animal's experience in the book. Illustrate the scene. Share the piece with the class.