Reflecting on Marley: Textual Evidence

Learning Targets
- Identify and interpret textual evidence.
- Write a response to a prompt, using textual evidence to support a thesis.

Preview
In this activity, you will read a memoir and use textual evidence in response to a writing prompt.

Setting a Purpose for Reading
- You will next read a newspaper column written by John Grogan about the death of his dog Marley. Mark the text by underlining or highlighting phrases, sentences, and clauses that tell why Grogan loved his dog despite his many faults.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
John Grogan (1957 – ) is a newspaper columnist and the author of the bestselling memoir *Marley and Me*, a book based on the ideas in the article you are about to read. *Marley and Me* has been adapted into a young reader’s edition, several children’s books, and a major motion picture. Grogan says he began writing in school because he “was so bad at everything else.” In addition to *Marley and Me*, he has written articles for numerous magazines and newspapers.

Memoir

Saying Farewell to a Faithful Pal

*by John Grogan, Inquirer Columnist*

1 In the gray of dawn, I found the shovel in the garage and walked down the hill to where the lawn meets the woods. There, beneath a wild cherry tree, I began to dig.

2 The earth was loose and blessedly unfrozen, and the work went fast. It was odd being out in the backyard without Marley, the Labrador retriever who for 13 years made it his business to be tight by my side for every excursion out the door, whether to pick a tomato, pull a weed, or fetch the mail. And now here I was alone, digging him this hole.

3 “There will never be another dog like Marley,” my father said when I told him the news, that I finally had to put the old guy down. It was as close to a compliment as our pet ever received.
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4 No one ever called him a great dog—or even a good dog. He was as wild as a banshee and as strong as a bull. He crashed joyously through life with a **gusto** most often associated with natural disasters.

5 He's the only dog I've ever known to get expelled from obedience school.

6 Marley was a chewer of couches, a slasher of screens, a slinger of drool, a tipper of trash cans. He was so big he could eat off the kitchen table with all four paws planted on the floor—and did so whenever we weren't looking.

7 Marley shredded more mattresses and dug through more drywall than I care to remember, almost always out of sheer terror brought on by his mortal enemy, thunder.

**CUTE BUT DUMB**

8 He was a majestic animal, nearly 100 pounds of quivering muscle wrapped in a luxurious fur coat the color of straw. As for brains, let me just say he chased his tail til the day he died, apparently he was on the verge of a major canine breakthrough.

9 That tail could clear a coffee table in one swipe. We lost track of the things he swallowed, including my wife's gold necklace, which we eventually recovered, shinier than ever. We took him with us once to a chi-chi outdoor café and tied him to the heavy wrought-iron table. Big mistake. Marley spotted a cute poodle and off he **bounded**, table in tow.

10 But his heart was pure.

11 When I brought my wife home from the doctor after our first pregnancy ended in a miscarriage, that wild beast gently rested his blocky head in her lap and just whimpered. And when babies finally arrived, he somehow understood they were something special and let them climb all over him, tugging his ears and pulling out little fistfuls of fur. One day when a stranger tried to hold one of the children, our jolly giant showed a ferocity we never imagined was inside him.

12 As the years passed, Marley mellowed, and sleeping became his favorite pastime. By the end, his hearing was shot, his teeth were gone, his hips so riddled with arthritis he barely could stand. **Despite** the infirmities, he greeted each day with the mischievous glee that was his hallmark. Just days before his death, I caught him with his head stuck in the garbage pail.

**LIFE LESSONS LEARNED**

13 A person can learn a lot from a dog, even a loopy one like ours.

14 Marley taught me about living each day with unbridled exuberance and joy, about seizing the moment and following your heart. He taught me to appreciate the simple things—a walk in the woods, a fresh snowfall, a nap in a shaft of winter sunlight. And as he grew old and achy, he taught me about **optimism** in the face of adversity.

15 Mostly, he taught me about friendship and selflessness and, above all else, unwavering loyalty.

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**Etymology**

The word **hallmark** is built from the words **hall** and **mark**. **Hall** refers to Goldsmiths’ Hall in London, where gold and silver were tested for purity and stamped. **Hallmark** means “a mark of excellence, quality, or purity.”

**WORD CONNECTIONS**

**bounded**: moved by leaping or jumping

**despite**: in spite of

**gusto**: hearty enjoyment

**optimism**: the tendency to see the best in all things
16 When his time came last week, I knelt beside him on the floor of the animal hospital, rubbing his gray snout as the veterinarian discussed cremation with me. No, I told her, I would be taking him home with me.

17 The next morning, our family would stand over the hole I had dug and say goodbye. The kids would tuck drawings in beside him. My wife would speak for us all when she’d say: “God, I’m going to miss that big, dumb lug.”

18 But now I had a few minutes with him before the doctor returned. I thought back over his 13 years—the destroyed furniture and goofy antics; the sloppy kisses and utter devotion. All in all, not a bad run.

19 I didn’t want him to leave this world believing all his bad press. I rested my forehead against his and said: “Marley, you are a great dog.”

Second Read
• Reread the memoir to answer these text-dependent comprehension questions.
• Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

1. **Craft and Structure:** How do the first two sentences of the memoir contribute to the text? What is the effect of these sentences on the reader?

2. **Key Ideas and Details:** What kind of personality does Marley have? What details in the text illustrate his personality?

3. **Knowledge and Ideas:** Which evidence supports the statement that Marley’s heart was pure?

4. **Craft and Structure:** In paragraphs 13 and 14, what are the connotations of the words *loopy* and *unbridled*? How do these words help the reader understand Marley?

**lug:** an awkward, clumsy fellow

**devotion:** dedication
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5. **Craft and Structure:** What was the author’s purpose for writing the memoir? How is the author’s purpose conveyed in the text?

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**Working from the Text**

6. Copy your textual evidence into the graphic organizer below.

<table>
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<th>Textual Evidence</th>
<th>Importance: What does the evidence tell you about Grogan’s feelings for his dog?</th>
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**Writing to Sources: Explanatory Text**

Why do people have pets? Using John Grogan and Marley as examples, explain what human beings love about and learn from their pets. Be sure to:

- Write a thesis statement (or topic sentence if the response is only one paragraph) including the topic and your opinion.
- Use textual evidence and supporting details from the newspaper column.
- Add personal commentary.