



Brandy and Val, LLC

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Discussion Guide

I'm a big advocate of getting books in the hands of toddlers as soon as possible! If children get excited about reading at an early age and find it an enjoyable activity, they'll want to continue the experience forever. Reading sparks the imagination as it stimulates the mind and Brandy and Val books accomplish this on a variety of levels. The following topics are recommended for children 2 - 6 but can be customized to suit different levels.

1. **TEACHING COLORS:** Each page of a Brandy and Val book uses a single background color; the rings binding the books are the four primary colors
2. **SHAPE RECOGNITION:** Each page of a Brandy and Val book uses one or two predominant shapes. Review the shapes used: rectangle, square, triangle, circle. Practice counting by asking, for example, "how many circles do we see on the page? Let's count how many circles we see in the book."
3. Stories have beginnings, middles and endings. Discuss the meaning of the words on the tabs: "Start" "Almost" "Done" "Finish" and how they relate to the book
4. Describe Brandy and Val's personalities. Can you tell what they are like from the stories? Encourage a discussion on how Brandy and Val are similar or different from a family or friend's pet. A similar discussion can be had comparing Brandy and Val's activities with another dog's.
5. Use the mini-Brandy and mini-Val toys to encourage children to make up their own stories about Brandy and Val or have them follow along with them while reading the books. For children with motor-skill deficits, the mini toys make a great squeeze tool!

SPECIFIC TOPICS FOR THE BOOK BRANDY AND VAL

1. Start a discussion about favorite toys, games (reference pages 2, 3) and activities (pages 6, 7) and what it is about them that makes them favorites. Ask: "Are they animal toys like Brandy and Val have or are they different? Is chasing squirrels up a tree silly? Why do you think Brandy likes to do that? Why do you think Val doesn't?"
2. In the summer, Brandy and Val play in the water. Talk about the types of places one can go swimming--a pool, a lake, an ocean, etc. Ask: "Do you like to swim? Have you ever gone swimming with a dog? What's the weather like in the summer, hot, cold, sunny, etc.?"
3. Having friends is an important part of child development. Talk about why it's good to have friends, discussing who their friends are and what they like to do with them. Continue with a discussion about caring and sharing with friends and family members.
4. Discuss the meaning of family. Brandy and Val spend a lot of time together. If there are siblings in the household, talk about what it's like to have a brother or sister; how it feels to be part of a family, to be loved and cared for? Topics here also include, friendship, spending time together, respect, kindness.

SPECIFIC TOPICS FOR THE BOOK BRANDY AND VAL'S FAVORITE THINGS

1. Discuss, what does the word "favorite" mean and what are some of the child's favorite things?
2. Talk about exploring outside activities. Ask: "Do you like going for walks? What else do you do outside, ride a bike, maybe? Do you do this with friends or with other people?" Bring up the subject of how this is all called "exercise" and how exercising or doing things that require moving your body is good for it and is good for the mind, too!
3. Brandy and Val play tug of war. Sharing, especially if there is a sibling in the family, is a good topic here! Ask: "Are Brandy and Val playing nicely together? Do they seem to be sharing?" It's good to share.
4. Now's a great time to start planting the seeds for good eating habits. Discuss what types of food are good for you and how Brandy and Val stay healthy by eating right. Ask, "Do you think they eat junk food? Are they fat?" Reinforce how and why it is good to eat fruit, vegetables, yogurt, etc. along with the occasional cookie!
5. Problems with going to bed at night? Brandy and Val seem to be happy having quiet time when they "lounged" and then fall asleep. Brandy dreams about squirrels. Discuss what dreams are.

SPECIFIC TOPICS FOR BRANDY AND VAL'S SPECIAL STORY

Despite the number of words in this book, don't be deterred to discuss and read it with youngsters! In my appearances, I find the children love to hear about Brandy and Val's adoption and why they are special members of our family.

1. Special Story is a great opportunity to introduce the concept of adoption. Depending on the circumstances, adoption of pets is relevant; in others, adoption of a sibling is appropriate
2. Bring up the subject of responsibility. Topics include, if a pet becomes a member of a family, how should it be treated by its members? Do pets deserve respect like people? Is it fun to tease a pet? Val and Brandy were both very skinny when they were adopted. Where they well cared for? Are they now?
3. Introduce "weather". (Refer to pages 5 & 7) and how it's different in various parts of the U.S. For example, in some places it is warm all the time (like at Disneyworld!); some places go from very cold to very hot--talk about seasons, if appropriate. Val never saw snow before, was he thinking about when he felt cold for the first time? Start a discussion of storms-- what is a hurricane? What other types of storms are there: tornado, earthquake, etc. If you live in an area predisposed to one of these types of storms, discuss. "How do you prepare? Do you think what happened to Val occurred because his family wasn't prepared?" If appropriate, talk about New Orleans in the United States and compare the climate and storms there compared to your part of the country.
5. If appropriate, talk about what an animal shelter or rescue is; what stray animals are and how they go to shelters until someone can adopt them. Encourage and reinforce respect for animals and people, helping those less fortunate. Another good example is caring for a sick family member.