



Leah and the Big Brown Dog

Ages 6-9
A story and 9 activities



Leah and the Big Brown Dog

Every morning, Leah walks to school with her neighbor, Mrs. Green. Every morning, they pass a house with a tall fence. And behind the fence lives a big brown dog named Bruno.

Bruno barks. He barks so loudly that Leah's heart jumps into her throat. Her legs turn to jelly. Each morning, she crosses to the other side of the street, practically running.

"Bruno is a friendly dog," says Mrs. Green. "He just likes to say hello."

"He sounds like he wants to eat me," says Leah.

Leah doesn't like feeling scared. She doesn't like crossing the street and holding her breath. She wants to walk past the fence like everybody else.

One afternoon, she tells her mother. "I'm afraid of dogs. Even small ones. They move so fast, and I don't know what they will do."

Mommy listens. She doesn't say, "There isn't anything to be afraid of." She says, "That sounds like a real fear. I wonder if we can help it get smaller."

"How?"

"Little by little. We don't jump into the scary thing all at once. We take small steps, each one a bit braver than the one before."

They make a list on a piece of paper, from the easiest step to the hardest.

Step one: Look at a picture of a dog. Step two: Watch a dog from far away, across a big space. Step three: Stand at the end of the block and listen to

Bruno bark. Step four: Walk by the fence with Mrs. Green. Step five: Stand near the fence for ten seconds. Step six: Ask Bruno's owner if I can meet him with the owner holding his collar.

"We can stop at any step if it feels like too much," says Mommy. "And we can repeat a step until it feels easier."

Leah takes a deep breath. "Okay."

On Monday, she looks at pictures of dogs in a book. Her tummy flutters at first, but after a few minutes, it settles.

On Tuesday, she stands at the park fence, a long way from the dogs, and watches them chase balls. She counts ten breaths while she watches.

On Wednesday, she and Mommy walk to the end of the block. From there, they can hear Bruno. Leah feels her heart pounding. "Breathe," says Mommy. They stay for one minute. Then another.

On Thursday, she walks by the fence with Mrs. Green. Bruno barks. Leah's knees wobble. But she keeps walking, one foot after another.

On Friday, she stands still next to the fence for ten seconds. She sees Bruno through the gap. His tail is wagging.

"He's wagging his tail," says Leah, surprised.

"That means he's happy to see you," says Mrs. Green.

The next week, Mr. Fine, Bruno's owner, invites her to the front yard. He holds Bruno's collar. Bruno sits very still, with his big brown eyes and floppy ears.

"You can pet his back if you want," says Mr. Fine. "Slowly. He likes it."

Leah's hand shakes as she reaches out. She touches Bruno's soft fur for one second. Then she pulls back, her heart racing.

"I did it," she whispers.

"You did," says Mr. Fine.

She does it again, and this time she stays a few seconds. Bruno's tail thumps against the ground.

On Monday morning, Leah walks right past the fence. Bruno barks, and she just waves. "Hi, Bruno," she says.

She is still nervous around loose dogs at the park. That will take another list. But Bruno she can do. On Friday she brings him half a cracker, and Mr. Fine says that is strictly against the rules, and lets her give it to him anyway.



Activity 1 of 9

Remember the story

1. What is the dog's name?

2. Who walks Leah to school each day?

3. What do Leah and Mommy make together?

4. What does Bruno's tail do?



Activity 2 of 9

Fact or guess? (circle one)

1. Bruno lives behind a tall fence. Fact / Guess
2. Bruno wants to eat Leah. Fact / Guess
3. Leah crosses the street to avoid Bruno at first. Fact / Guess
4. Leah stops being nervous about dogs completely. Fact / Guess



Activity 3 of 9

Think and write

1. What is something that scares you a little? What could be step one?

2. Why does Mommy not say 'there is nothing to be afraid of'?

3. How does Leah's body feel at each step, and what helps?

Activity 4 of 9

Word search (find all 6)

Words: BRUNO, FENCE, STEPS, BRAVE, DOG, COLLAR

A	G	E	S	F	U	Y	A	J	R	P
E	D	D	M	B	C	O	S	J	M	R
H	F	S	R	L	C	H	J	J	F	V
K	M	B	P	K	F	E	N	C	E	O
C	I	R	P	E	D	W	P	M	M	A
I	G	U	C	J	B	R	A	V	E	C
B	O	N	O	S	B	I	F	P	T	P
P	D	O	B	R	T	B	P	C	T	O
C	O	L	L	A	R	E	H	T	O	Y
I	W	C	U	A	B	K	P	V	M	N
L	B	U	Y	J	U	O	J	S	S	A



Activity 5 of 9

Scrambled words (from the story)

1. EEFCN = _____

2. SESTP = _____

3. EABRRV = _____

4. RLOACL = _____

5. GWINGA = _____



Activity 6 of 9

Say it out loud

Practice each line in a calm, steady voice:

"I feel nervous, and I can take one small step."

"I will stay for one more breath."

"I'm getting braver."



Activity 7 of 9

My chart

My Brave Steps Chart

#	Step	How scared (1 to 5)	How I felt after
Step 1			
Step 2			
Step 3			



Activity 8 of 9

Draw it

Draw Leah's steps like a staircase, each one a bit higher than the last.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to draw Leah's steps as a staircase.



Activity 9 of 9

Answers

Remember the story:

1. Bruno
2. Mrs. Green
3. A list of small steps from easy to hard
4. It wags

Fact or guess: 1 Fact; 2 Guess; 3 Fact; 4 Guess

Scrambled words: FENCE, STEPS, BRAVER, COLLAR, WAGGING

Think and write: answers will vary; talk them over together.