

Lesson 18

ANCHOR TEXT



✓ GENRE

An **autobiography** is a person's account of his or her own life. As you read, look for:

- ▶ first-person point of view
- ▶ the author's personal thoughts and feelings
- ▶ information about the author's life



MEET THE AUTHOR

Peg Kehret

B.J. may have been the first animal to inspire Peg Kehret's writing, but he certainly was not the last. The author loves animals and lives with several adopted pets. She has written both fiction and nonfiction, including *Shelter Dogs: Amazing Stories of Adopted Strays*.



MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR

Tim Jessell

Tim Jessell calls his digital illustration style realistic "with a twist." He used to be a drummer for a rock band, but now he spends most of his time either with his three children or practicing the sport of falconry with his bird, Spike.

The Dog

Newspaper


from **Five Pages a Day**

by Peg Kehret • selection illustrated by Tim Jessell



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do facts and opinions contribute to a story?



I began my writing **career** at the age of ten when I wrote and sold the *Dog Newspaper*. This weekly **publication**, which cost five cents a copy, reported on the local dogs.

I interviewed every neighbor who had a dog. “What exciting thing has your dog done?” I asked.

People responded, “All Fluffy does is eat, sleep, and bark at the mailman.” Or, “Max’s only excitement is his daily walk on the leash.” Such answers did not lead to important news stories.

I didn’t give up. “If your dog could talk,” I asked, “what do you think he would say?”

“Feed me,” was the most common answer, followed by, “Let’s play.”

What could a writer do with such boring material? The solution sat at my feet, wagging his tail.

The first issue of the *Dog Newspaper* featured my dog, B.J., on the entire front page. Although his life at that time was as **uneventful** as the lives of the other neighborhood dogs, B.J. had a unique **background**.



Uncle Bill, my mother's younger brother, was a soldier in the U.S. Army during World War II. While in Germany, his unit went into a town that had recently been bombed. As they searched for survivors in a destroyed building, they came across a mother dog and her litter of puppies. The mother dog was dead. So were all the puppies except one.

The soldiers, who had seen far too much of death and **destruction**, carefully lifted that little brown dog from his littermates. One soldier tucked the puppy inside his jacket to keep him warm. The men fed him from their own food supplies, shared water from their canteens, and decided to keep him as the company mascot.

From then on, wherever Uncle Bill and his comrades went, the dog went, too. They named him B.J. because he was a Big Job to take care of, especially when they were fighting a war.

B.J. grew bigger and stronger as he traveled with the soldiers, tagging along on every mission and somehow surviving even when the men were too busy to pay attention to him.

As the soldiers fought to protect the free world, B.J. did his duty, too. He slept with them in foxholes; he trudged long miles across burned and barren land; he helped search rubble for signs of life. Most of all, he offered love and laughter to a group of lonely, weary men who were far from home.

When the war ended, the soldiers rejoiced. Soon they would be going home to their loved ones. But what about B.J.? They knew they could not leave him in Germany. The German people were faced with the task of rebuilding their cities and their lives; no one wanted to bother with a dog, especially a dog who belonged to the Americans.

The men decided to chip in enough money to fly B.J. back to the United States. Then they had a drawing to see who got to keep him. Each soldier wrote his name on a slip of paper and put the paper in a helmet. The winning name was drawn: Bill Showers! My uncle.

Uncle Bill lived with my family, so B.J. was flown from Germany to Minneapolis, where my parents picked him up at the airport and drove him to our home in Austin, Minnesota.

I was nine years old and delighted by the addition of this wire-haired schnauzer (at least, we thought he might be a schnauzer) to our household.

According to Uncle Bill, B.J. understood many commands in both English and German. Since none of us spoke German, we had no way to prove this claim.

B.J. quickly became my dog. Although B.J. was overjoyed when my uncle arrived home after his discharge, Uncle Bill did not stay in Austin long. He got married and headed to the University of Minnesota, where dogs were not allowed in student housing. B.J. stayed with my family.

I showered him with loving attention. I brushed him, tied ribbons on his collar, took him for walks, and read aloud to him. B.J. seemed especially fond of the Raggedy Ann and Andy stories, which were favorites of mine as well.

ANALYZE THE TEXT

Main Ideas and Details What main ideas has the author included so far? How are they supported by details? Explain how these details help you relate to the author's life.



B.J. had lived with us for a year when I launched the *Dog Newspaper*. He was a fascinating front-page subject, and the first **edition** of the *Dog Newspaper* sold twelve copies.

Even though my lead story **required** little research, this sixty cents was not easy money. All those interviews about the neighbor dogs took time. Also, I grew up before there were copy machines, so I couldn't just go to the local copy center and run off twelve copies of the paper. Using a pencil, I wrote every word twelve times. Then I delivered my newspapers and collected my pay.

B.J. and I became famous on our block. Neighbors were enthralled by the story, and I gobbled up congratulations on my writing the way B.J. ate his dinner. All of my customers agreed to purchase the next issue of the *Dog Newspaper*.

Giddy with success, I immediately began writing the second issue. The neighborhood dogs were still every bit as boring as they had been a week earlier, so I decided to repeat my winning **formula** and use B.J. as the main article again. Since I had already told the only unusual thing about my dog, this time I wrote a story called "B.J.'s Gingerbread House."



Our new washing machine had arrived in a large cardboard box. I kept the box to create a special house for B.J., who slept in the basement every night.

I spent hours decorating the box, copying a picture of a gingerbread house that was in one of my books. I colored curlicues; I blistered my hands cutting designs in the cardboard; I painted flowers on the sides. The gingerbread house was absolutely breathtaking.

At bedtime that night, I took B.J. down to the basement and put his blanket in the beautiful gingerbread house. I petted him and kissed him and told him I knew he would sleep well.

The next morning, I couldn't believe my eyes. B.J. had licked the glue from the cardboard, creating a sticky mess in his beard, and had chewed the house into dozens of pieces. He pranced toward me through the wreckage that littered the floor.

This story was quite a bit shorter than the story of B.J.'s rescue from a bombed-out house in Germany—and far less interesting. I filled the rest of issue number two of the *Dog Newspaper* with stirring reports such as “Rusty Knocks over Garbage Can” and “Cleo Chases Cat.” After I delivered my papers, I eagerly waited for more compliments on my exciting journalism. None came. The next issue was even worse. Since B.J. still had done nothing newsworthy, I used the front page to describe what a beautiful and great dog he was. The other dogs, as always, got brief mention on the back page. Desperate to fill the space, I even wrote a story titled “Skippy Gets a Bath.”

Issue number three was a publishing disaster. Few people read it, and the only person who purchased issue number four was my grandpa. Less than one month after its launch, the *Dog Newspaper* went out of business.

ANALYZE THE TEXT

Fact and Opinion Why is the author's statement above, “Less than one month after its launch, the *Dog Newspaper* went out of business,” a fact? What are some other facts on this page?





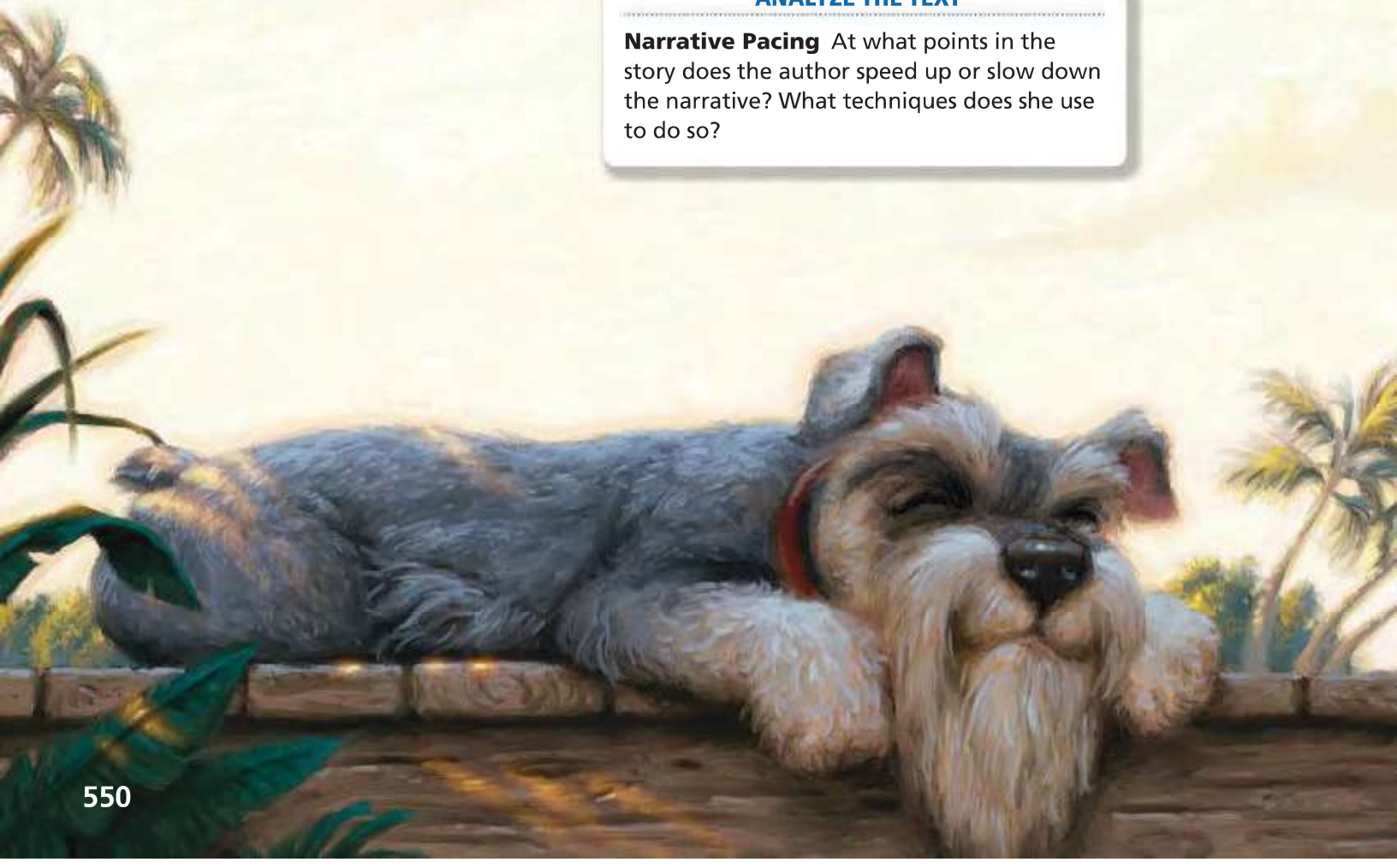
I believed my writing career was over. My mistake, I thought then, was always putting my own dog on the front page. Now I realize that having dull material was an even bigger error. Would the *Dog Newspaper* have succeeded if I had featured Rusty or Fluffy or Cleo? Probably not, because Rusty, Fluffy, Cleo, and all the other neighborhood dogs hadn't done anything special.

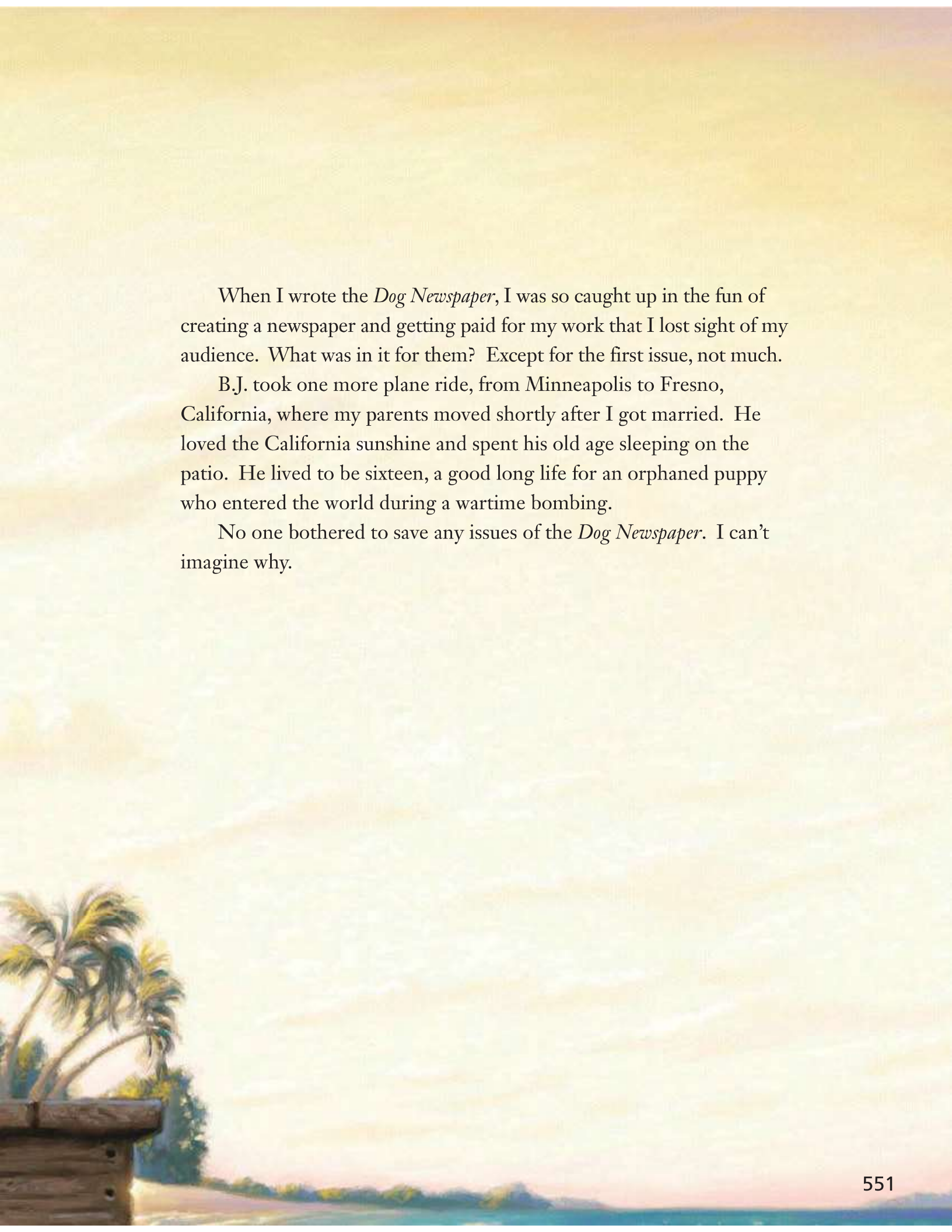
If Fluffy had gotten lost and been returned home in a police car, or if Cleo had won a prize in a dog show, or if Rusty had given birth to puppies, then perhaps the neighbors would have wanted to read my articles.

Now I know that if I want people to read what I write, I must write something that they find interesting. I need exciting plots, unique information, and fresh **insights**.

ANALYZE THE TEXT

Narrative Pacing At what points in the story does the author speed up or slow down the narrative? What techniques does she use to do so?





When I wrote the *Dog Newspaper*, I was so caught up in the fun of creating a newspaper and getting paid for my work that I lost sight of my audience. What was in it for them? Except for the first issue, not much.

B.J. took one more plane ride, from Minneapolis to Fresno, California, where my parents moved shortly after I got married. He loved the California sunshine and spent his old age sleeping on the patio. He lived to be sixteen, a good long life for an orphaned puppy who entered the world during a wartime bombing.

No one bothered to save any issues of the *Dog Newspaper*. I can't imagine why.