



Fr. Michael Goetz Library Learning Commons Teacher's Book Review



Laika, Nick Abadzis

Reviewed by Ms. Cosgrove, October 17th, 2012.

Scientists can sometimes be guided in their research by the ideology that the ends justify the means. This was the mantra at the heart of the space race between the Russians and the Americans in the late 1950s. After the wildly successful Russian launch of Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite in October of 1957, it was decided that another launch should take place. It would occur one month later to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution. This particular launch would garner world attention because it would be occupied by the world's first living space traveler, a little dog.

However, Sputnik 2 was doomed from the start. A month was not nearly enough time for even the most brilliant Soviet scientists to devise the space craft systems which would allow the dog to survive the trip, yet alone return to earth. So, too, was the expedition tainted with deception. Media reports out of the Soviet Union insisted that the little dog survived for four days after which time it was humanely euthanized, when in fact the poor creature succumbed to stress and overheating of the space capsule in less than five hours. Knowing that this fact would detract from both national and international support of the space program, the decision was made to lie about what really happened to the unfortunate animal. Forty years later, one of the lead scientists associated with the launch, Oleg Gazenko, expressed his lingering doubts when he confessed:

Work with animals is a source of suffering to all of us. We treat them like babies who cannot speak. The more time passes, the more I'm sorry about it. We did not learn enough from the mission to justify the death of the dog. (Abadzis 201)

Over half a century has passed since the historic, and many would say tragic launch and much progress has been made in the area of animal rights – due to the existence of computer software enabling scientists to conduct simulated research conditions and due in part, I'd like to think, to the growing opinion that all life is sacred and the measure of our humanity is to some degree gauged by how we value life in all of its forms. The little dog's name was *Laika*, also the name of the graphic book by Nick Abadzis.