

Social Studies

Dogs on the Job



By Jim Aaron

Vocabulary

ambition

infested

landslide

quicksand

resistance

rickety

roamed

vast

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Introduction

Dogs are often called “man’s best friend.” They make wonderful pets and companions. However, if you think that’s all dogs do, think again! Dogs are also amazing helpers.

Dogs have worked with humans over a vast span of time. They roamed with hunters in ancient times, tracking down prey. They guarded homes and castles, fought side-by-side with soldiers, and even rescued drowning swimmers. Today, dogs still perform some of these jobs and more.

This guide dog assists a boy with cerebral palsy.



Military working dogs help soldiers find weapons and explosives.



How are dogs selected for different kinds of activities? Often they are chosen for their traits or natural abilities. For instance, while all dogs have an excellent sense of smell, some dogs are superior sniffers! Bloodhounds, beagles, and dachshunds have especially sensitive noses.

Dogs are also chosen on the basis of their instincts and behaviors. These instinctual behaviors have developed over thousands of years of breeding and training. They include: barking, sniffing, fetching, hunting, protecting their territory, and looking for shelter.

Sometimes we make assumptions about dog instincts and behaviors. For instance, you might assume that a big golden retriever would make a good watchdog because of its size. Big dogs look tough, don’t they? However, golden retrievers bark very little, so they are not ideal for this job. Miniature schnauzers, on the other hand, bark a great deal. Despite their small size, they make better watchdogs than golden retrievers do!

Read on, and learn more surprising facts about dogs that help!



The nose knows! Dogs can smell odors a million times weaker than the ones that humans can smell.

Chapter I: Assistance Dogs

Dogs have long been considered healers. In ancient Greece, doctors allowed dogs to lick patients' wounds because they thought a dog's tongue had special healing abilities. We now know this isn't true. Still, many people find a dog's companionship to be soothing. This is one of many reasons why they are so helpful to people with disabilities.

In the early twentieth century, dogs served on the battlefields of World War I. Many of these dogs were later trained as guides for the soldiers who were blinded as a result of combat injuries. The first dog-training school was in Germany. Now, guide dogs are trained throughout the world.



Now there are many different organizations that train puppies to become guide dogs.



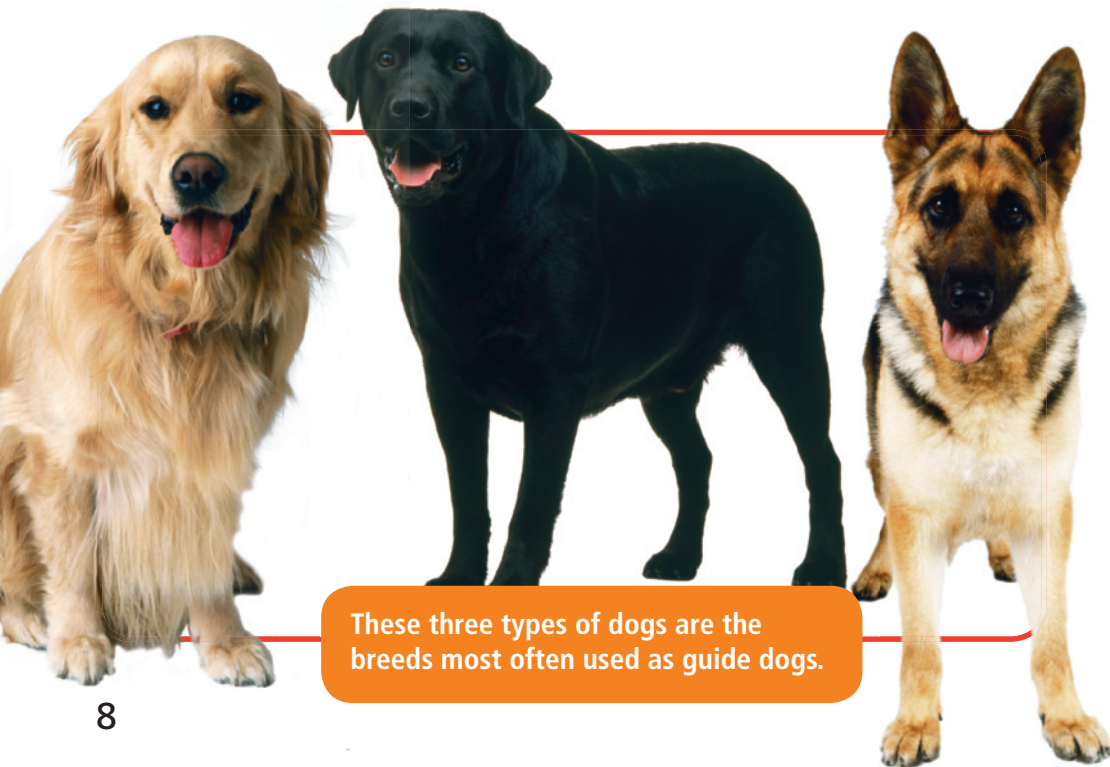
A guide dog companion helps a blind person get around safely.

Guide dogs help their human partners move around and become more independent and confident. Human and dog partners each receive training in how to work together. Today, approximately 10,000 people in the United States alone use guide dogs.

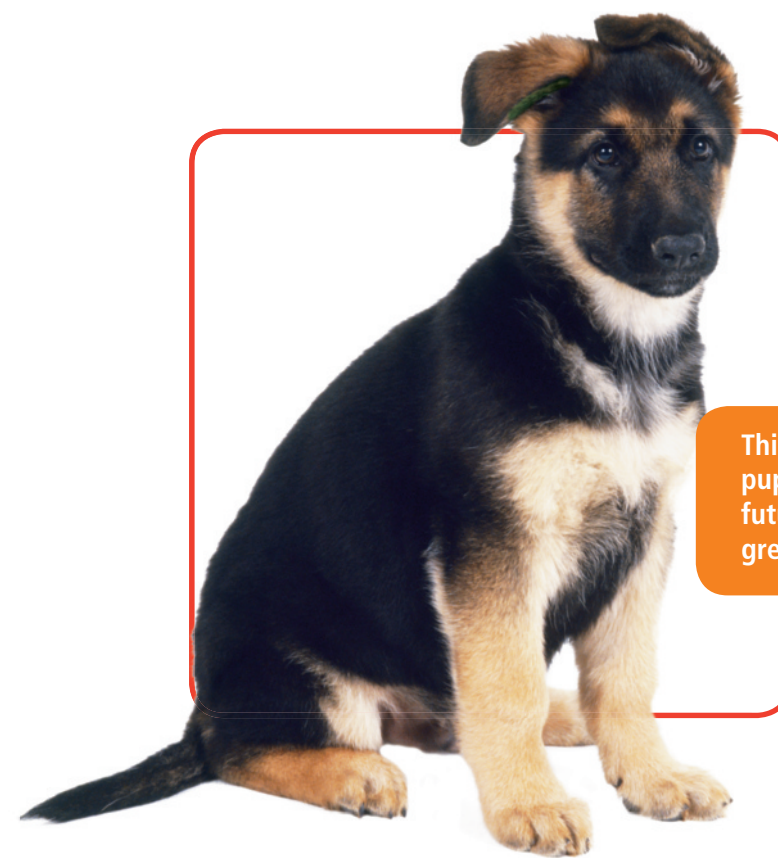
Guide Dogs of America is an organization that raises and trains guide dogs for blind and visually impaired people. Started in 1948 by Joseph Jones, Sr., it is a California-based organization. Joseph started the organization because he was refused a dog by other organizations due to his age. He was only 57 years old.

Guide dog trainers look for three things in their dogs: willingness, health, and temperament. Willingness means that a dog has the **ambition** to work. Good health is also essential for guide dogs because they have to be strong and work hard for extended periods of time. Temperament has to do with the nature, or personality, of the dog. Trainers look for dogs that are calm and even-tempered.

To many observers, most dogs may seem similarly calm and even-tempered. Dog experts, however, recognize the differences in the abilities and temperaments of various breeds. Labrador retrievers, golden retrievers, and German shepherds are chosen most often as guide dogs because they are generally healthy, willing, and have an easy-going temperament.



These three types of dogs are the breeds most often used as guide dogs.



This German shepherd puppy is identified as a future guide dog by a green mark on its ear.

A guide dog's training begins when it is a puppy. It spends the first year and a half living with a volunteer individual or family. Puppy raisers help the puppy become socialized and train it to obey—to sit, stay, lie down, and come when called. The family takes its puppy-in-training out into the world to experience grocery stores, crowded streets, churches, staircases, subways, buses—they go everywhere!

Does this seem like too much noise and confusion for a young puppy? Not for a future guide dog, it isn't! The puppy must learn to be comfortable in crowds and other surprising and new situations, and to stay calm and continue working among strangers or other animals.

After about a year and a half, a puppy is ready to leave its family and go to school. For the next four to six months, the puppy will have to work hard and prove itself. It will learn how to lead someone safely both indoors and outdoors, over firm and **rickety** surfaces.

It also learns “intelligent disobedience.” This means that if a guide dog is given a command to do something it senses will be harmful or dangerous, such as stepping into traffic, it is trained to show **resistance**. It will refuse to obey. This way, its human partner knows it isn’t safe to move forward.



It's for you! A service dog picks up the phone.

A guide dog and its master on the go



Only the most skilled and well-trained dogs graduate to become guide dogs. Those that do are then matched with a partner and trained to work together. Today, guide dogs are used to help many people with illnesses and disabilities. They can turn on lights, open a washing machine, or pick up objects their partners need.

Other service dogs, called “special skills dogs,” are just that—they are dogs with special skills. Sam, a collie, is a lifeline for Alan, his owner. Alan has diabetes. When Alan is asleep, Sam is able to sense when Alan’s blood sugar level drops and wake him up. Without that wake-up call, Alan could become very sick or die. Scientists still aren’t absolutely sure how it is that dogs like Sam can do this. Some scientists think that these dogs may be able to notice a change in the person’s body chemistry.

Chapter 2: Therapy Dogs

Dogs can help people suffering from many problems. Therapy dogs help in two ways: through Animal Assisted Activities (AAA) and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT).

These dogs do not need special training. They do need, however, to be especially friendly and calm. They may be brought into a nursing home to cheer up seniors or to a hospital to give comfort to patients.

Therapy dogs are different from service dogs in one important way: they are not protected by the law. Service dogs have laws that protect them from being harmed or distracted from doing their jobs. Therapy dogs are usually pets, and often the owners and pets make visits together.

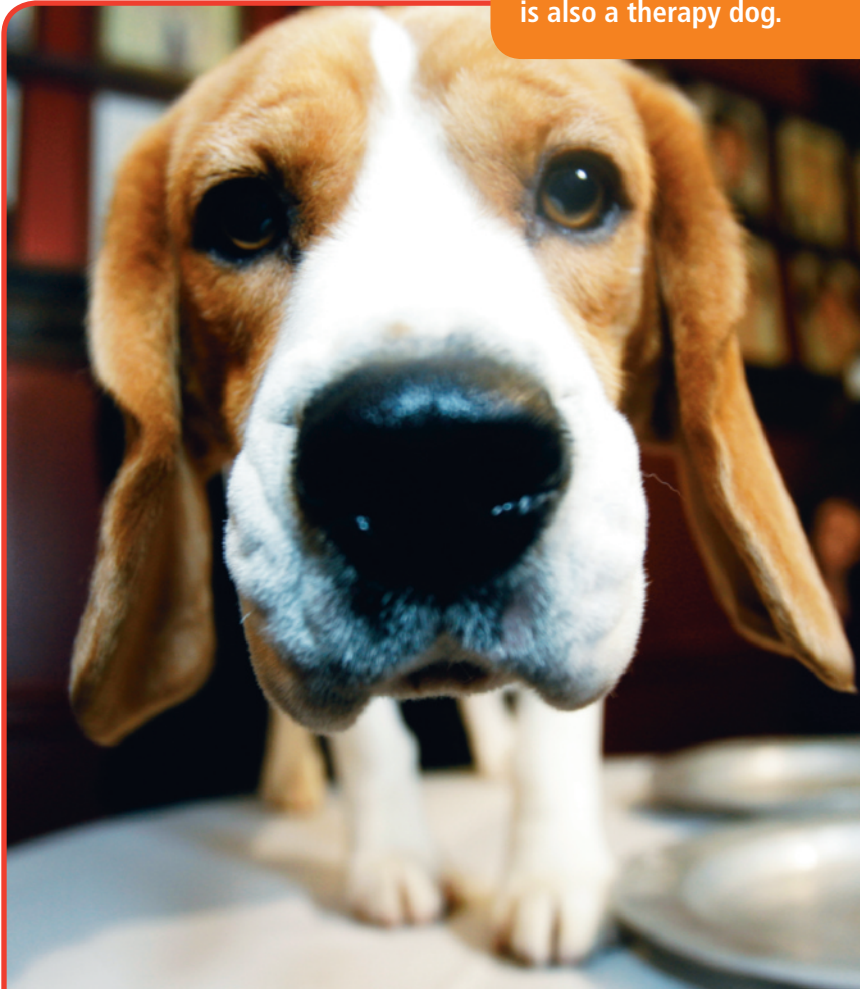
Often, therapy dogs can be animals of any breed that just happen to have the right temperament to help people who are sick, disabled, or simply lonely. These dogs know when a person needs encouragement, a warm cuddle, or someone to lean on. They can help soothe a child who is experiencing a tantrum or other emotional outburst. Therapy dogs can also keep people safe by keeping them calm and happy.



A girl relaxes with a therapy dog.

After winning the title of “Best in Show” at the 2008 Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, Uno the beagle started training as a therapy dog. Now, he visits people in hospitals, classrooms, nursing homes, and other places around New York City. David Frei, the dog show’s spokesman, said: “Uno’s win at Westminster confirmed his role as America’s best dog. However, now that Uno is a certified therapy dog, he is much more than a pretty face. He has the ability to comfort and love those who are in serious need, and that goes beyond breeding.”

Uno, a champion show dog, is also a therapy dog.



Having a dog close by helps children learn to read.

Do dogs like being read to? Yes—when they are R.E.A.D. (Reading Education Assistance Dogs)! These therapy animals visit schools and libraries to help children who have trouble reading. Reading to a dog helps children enjoy reading. A second grader in Salt Lake City, Utah, said, “I really scared that big black dog the other day! I read him a ghost story!”

Dogs who visit school must be especially calm in their temperament because they are often mobbed by excited, noisy children. They also have to be willing to sit patiently next to the child while he or she is reading.

Chapter 3: Search-and-Rescue Dogs

Can dogs have a nose for danger? They can if they are search-and-rescue (SAR) dogs. These animals are trained to find missing people. They may work in the wilderness or in the middle of a big city. Their human partners may be police officers, firefighters, or rescue workers.

Dogs are great for this job because they are able to pick up the scent of a person. Scientists still aren't sure how dogs do this. Many scientists believe that dogs smell a person's dried sweat. Others believe they smell the dead skin cells that naturally fall off a person's body.

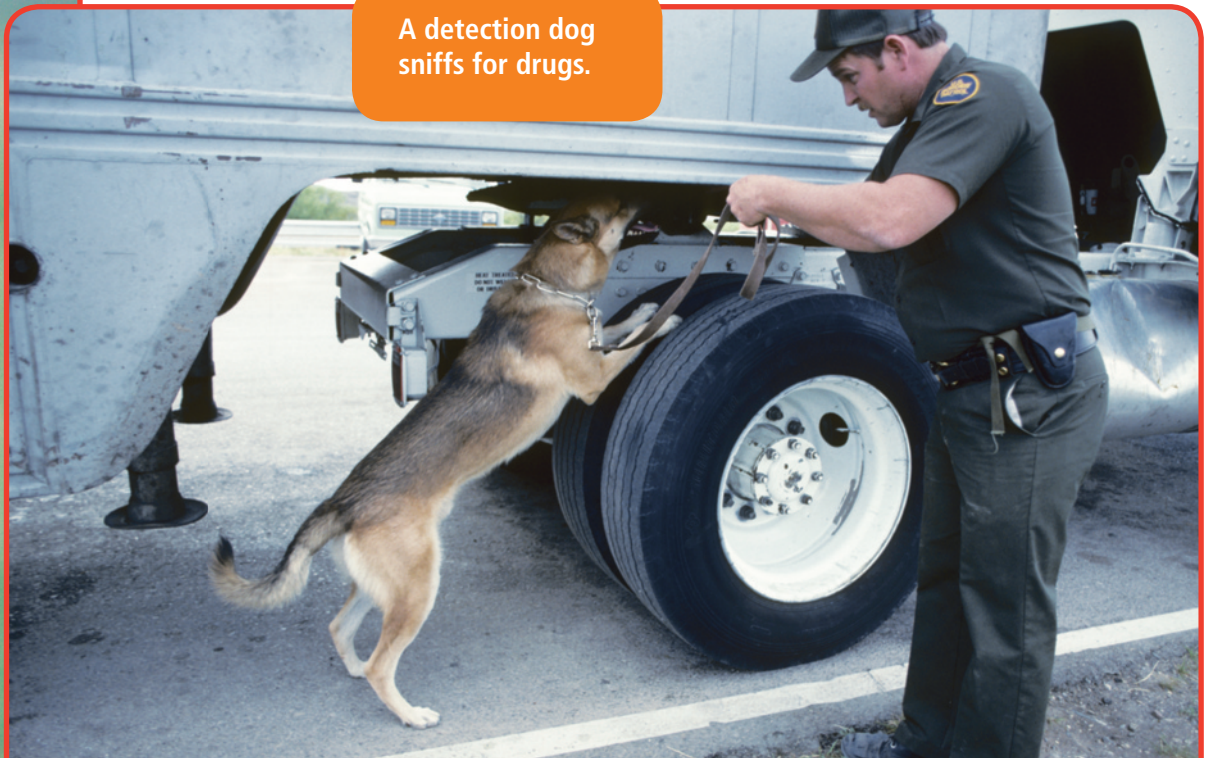
Another important use for a sniffer dog is detection work. Dogs are trained to sniff out specific things, such as explosives, drugs, or money. Many detection dogs work with law enforcement officials, such as the police and the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) to help them solve crimes.

Other detection dogs are trained to help homeowners keep their homes from becoming **infested** with termites. Termites are insects that chew wood, which can destroy homes. While humans can sometimes see this destruction, dogs are whizzes at smelling termites, even before the insects cause real problems. How is this possible? When termites eat wood, they produce methane gas. Dogs, with their remarkable sense of smell, can easily sniff out the methane gas.

Search-and-rescue (SAR) dogs in training.



A detection dog sniffs for drugs.





Dogs helped out after the World Trade Center tragedy.



yellow labrador



keeshond

Chapter 4: Dogs at Ground Zero

On September 11, 2001, a horrible disaster occurred in New York City. Two planes struck the World Trade Center towers in a terrorist attack, demolishing them, and killing and injuring many people. The place where the towers stood became known as “Ground Zero.”

Shortly after the attacks, a **landslide** of support came to the area. Hundreds of firefighters, police officers, and rescue workers from all over the world helped search for survivors in the rubble. Search-and-rescue dogs helped, too, trying to sniff out trapped individuals.

Many therapy dogs were also brought to the scene of the tragedy. Grief, depression, and anger were some of the difficult emotions that could make the workers’ energy and spirits sink as if they were in **quicksand**.

Tikva, a keeshond, and Kate, a yellow Labrador retriever, gave relief and comfort to firefighters and others working at Ground Zero. Cindy Ehlers, Tikva’s partner, said: “Over and over again I’ve heard the men say, ‘That dog made my day.’ They pet Tikva and say how soft she is when all they’ve felt is iron or cement.” Whether in everyday situations or national emergencies, dogs have proven themselves to be heroes over and over again. No wonder dogs are known as “man’s best friend.”

Glossary

ambition *n.* strong desire to rise to a high position in life

infested *adj.* troubled or disturbed by large numbers of things, such as bugs

landslide *n.* the sliding of a mass of soil or rock down a steep slope

quicksand *n.* very deep, wet, soft sand that supports hardly any weight

resistance *n.* the act of striving against or opposing

rickety *adj.* likely to fall or break down; not sturdy

roamed *v.* wandered about with no special aim or plan

vast *adj.* very huge and wide; immense

Reader Response

1. Which of these sentences is a fact, and which is an opinion?
 - a. "Dogs are often called 'man's best friend.'"
 - b. "They make wonderful pets and companions."

Would you agree or disagree with the opinion? Why?

2. What confused you as you were reading? What questions did you have? What did you do to answer those questions? Use a chart like the one below to organize your answer.

Questions I had	Answers	How I found the answer

3. What does the word *landslide* on page 18 mean? How can you use the words around this word to understand its meaning?
4. What do you think would be the most rewarding part of training a service dog? Why?

Suggested levels for Guided Reading, DRA™, Lexile®, and Reading Recovery™ are provided in the Pearson Scott Foresman Leveling Guide.

Genre	Comprehension Skills and Strategy	Text Features
Nonfiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fact and Opinion• Compare and Contrast• Monitor and Clarify	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Table of Contents• Headings• Captions• Glossary

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