Dogs at Work

A Reading A–Z Level P Leveled Book
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Reading A-Z

LEVELED BOOK • P

Dogs at Work

MULTI LEVEL
J•M•P

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Focus Question

How can dogs help people?

Words to Know

alert	detection
chemicals	disabilities
comfort	spasms

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Correlation

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Reading Recovery	28
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sled dogs

hunting dog

herding dogs

Introduction

You probably know that some dogs aren't just pets—they hold jobs! Some dogs can work on farms, guarding or herding animals. Other dogs can pull sleds or help people hunt. Dogs have worked with people for thousands of years.

What makes dogs such great workers? They learn fast, and they can also hear and smell better than we can. This means that dogs can do jobs that people can't. Some of their jobs may surprise you.

Service and Therapy Dogs

Many dogs work with people to help them feel better. These dogs are called *therapy dogs*. Therapy dogs **comfort** people and keep them calm. These dogs sometimes visit sick people in hospitals to cheer them up. Therapy dogs need to have a friendly personality. They are trained to react calmly to new places, smells, and people.

Studies show that simply petting a dog can be good for you. It can lower your stress, for instance.

Other dogs help people with **disabilities**. These dogs are called *service dogs*. Service dogs can do many different jobs. For example, guide dogs help people who cannot see well. These dogs are trained to keep people from stepping into traffic. Guide dogs are also trained to lead their owner around objects. That way, their owner won't trip or fall.

A guide dog helps its owner exit a subway train in China.

Tennille the Guide Dog

Guide dogs can be trained to help their owner have adventures. A guide dog named Tennille helped her owner hike in the wilderness. Tennille was the first guide dog trained to do this. Her owner, Trevor Thomas, is blind. Tennille helped Thomas over and around large rocks. She also looked for trail signs and led Thomas up to them. Thomas would then read the signs with his fingers. Thomas hopes that he and Tennille can encourage other blind people to follow their example.
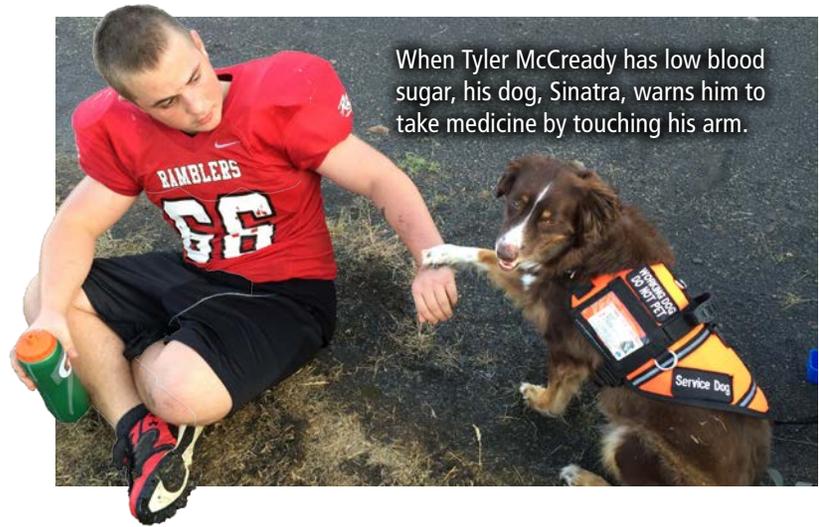
Service dogs help their owner with many day-to-day tasks, including opening doors by pulling ropes (left) and pushing buttons (bottom).

When Tyler McCready has low blood sugar, his dog, Sinatra, warns him to take medicine by touching his arm.

Some service dogs help people who can't hear well. These dogs listen for noises (like a doorbell), touch their owner, and move toward the noise. Some service dogs also help their owner move around. They pull wheelchairs, pick up dropped objects, press buttons, and open doors.

Some service dogs use their nose to help their owner. For example, dogs can help people with low blood sugar. These dogs can smell changes in blood and **alert** their owner to eat food or take medicine.

Other service dogs can smell when a person is about to have a seizure. These sudden attacks cause body **spasms** and other problems. Service dogs can warn the person before it happens.

Other dogs work with children who have food allergies. Some children can't eat peanuts. Service dogs can help them by smelling hidden peanuts in food.

Search-and-Rescue Dogs

Some dogs work to find people who are lost, hurt, or trapped. These dogs are called *search-and-rescue (SAR) dogs*.

Many SAR dogs use their powerful nose to find people who need help. Dogs can be trained to do this in two different ways. The first way is through "tracking"—putting their nose to the ground to follow a scent. Tracking dogs can follow a missing person when the scent is fresh. They need to work quickly, before the scent fades.

A search-and-rescue dog helps police track down a boy who wandered out of his house one night.

The second way that dogs can search for missing people is by sniffing the air instead of the ground. These "air-scent" dogs often work in a big search area. Using only their nose, they can find skiers trapped under 5 meters (16 ft.) of snow. They can also find lost hikers. They can even find people trapped in buildings that have fallen down. The air-scent method is easier for dogs to learn since dogs sniff this way naturally.

A firefighter uses a rescue dog to search an accident site in China.

A Newfoundland practices a water rescue in England.

Other SAR dogs work in the water instead of on land. Water rescue dogs can be trained to pull drowning people to safety. They can find people underwater and pull small boats to land. Water rescue dogs need to be strong swimmers. For this reason, big dogs like Newfoundlands make good water rescue dogs. Newfoundland dogs have waterproof fur and webbed toes, and they love to swim. They are also much stronger than human lifeguards. A 68-kilogram (150 lb.) Newfoundland can pull ten people to safety at once!

Detection Dogs

Some dogs work as detectives. These dogs are called **detection** dogs. They use their sense of smell to help people find things that are hidden.

Police use detection dogs often. They use arson dogs when a building has burned down. It may be hard to find out whether someone started the fire on purpose. Arson dogs sniff for **chemicals** that might have been used to start the fire.
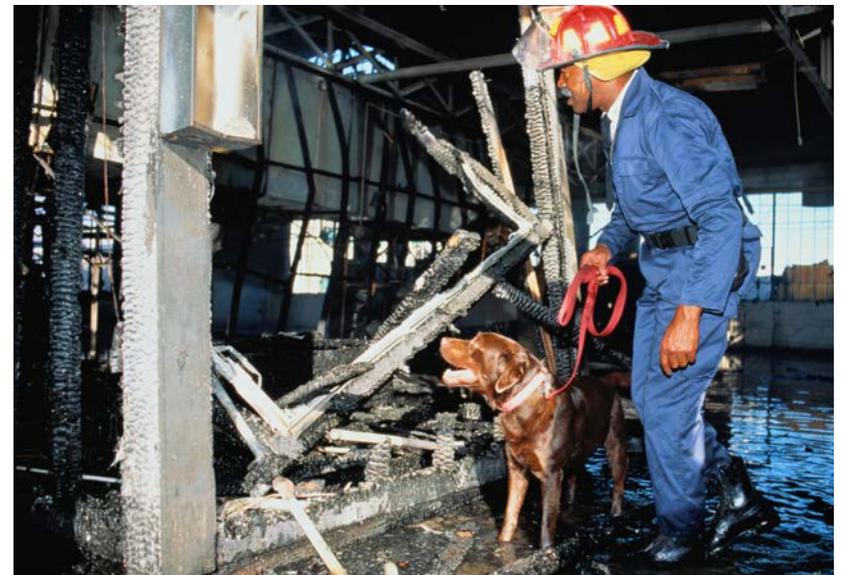
An arson dog searches a burned building for chemicals.

A dog sniffs for illegal items in luggage coming into the United Kingdom.

Detection dogs are also used at airports and border crossings. These dogs search for objects that cannot be brought into a country or onto a plane. It's usually illegal to bring fresh fruit or live animals across a border without permission. Detection dogs can find these things hidden in people's bags. Police also use detection dogs to find criminals.

Other detection dogs work outside the world of crime. For example, some dogs are trained to search for termites in houses and other buildings. Termites damage buildings by eating wood. They are hard for humans to find, but termite dogs can sniff them out.

Detection dogs may even be able to help doctors in the future. Some dogs, for example, seem to be able to smell cancer in humans. Scientists are studying these dogs to see if they can help doctors find cancer quickly in their patients.

A dog shows off its skills by sniffing samples of people's breath to detect lung cancer.

Odd Jobs

Dogs are good learners, and they can be trained to do very unusual jobs. For example, a dog named Piper worked with his owner at an airport in Michigan. His job was to chase wild birds out o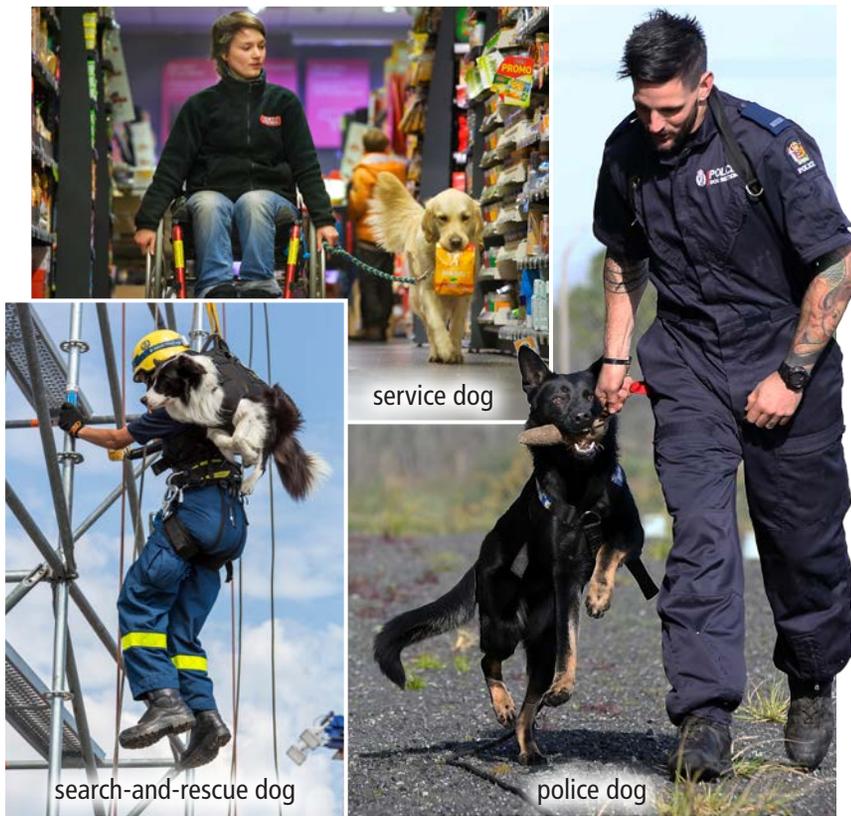f the path of planes on runways. Another group of dogs had an unusual job at an oceanside baseball park in San Francisco. These dogs jumped into the ocean to get balls that were hit into the water. The ball-retrieval program is now over, but for a time, baseball fans loved to collect these "Splash Hit" balls.

Piper the airport worker

service dog

search-and-rescue dog

police dog

Conclusion

Dogs help us do many types of jobs. As our work changes and grows, so do the jobs we give to dogs. From sniffing out cancer cells to pulling a swimmer to safety, dogs help humans in many ways. Their strength, friendliness, intelligence, and powerful senses make dogs wonderful workers.

Glossary

alert *(v.)* to warn or inform (p. 8)

chemicals *(n.)* substances that have certain properties and can combine with other substances to make new things (p. 12)

comfort *(v.)* to offer hope and help in a difficult time; to soothe (p. 5)

detection *(n.)* the act of discovering the presence of something; the act of solving a mystery (p. 12)

disabilities *(n.)* physical or mental conditions that limit a person's ability to do something (p. 6)

spasms *(n.)* uncontrolled and unnatural movements caused by muscles suddenly becoming tight (p. 8)