

Dogs: Teacher's notes and tips - elementary

1 Pre-reading tasks

- a Write on the board *man's best friend* and ask students who or what they think is the best friend of man. Point out that in this phrase *man* means humans (or mankind) rather than a male person! If they need help, tell them that it's an animal.
- b If there are no correct suggestions tell students that, in some cultures, dogs are considered man's best friend. Are they surprised by this idea? Do they agree? Or do they think another animal is a better friend?

Tip: be culturally aware

In some cultures, dogs have negative connotations and the idea that dogs are considered so highly may be offensive – but if this is the case ask students, if they can, to say why they think this. Students are more likely to say something if they feel strongly about a subject!

- c Perhaps one of the reasons that dogs are considered 'best friends' is that they are trained to do many different things for people. Brainstorm ideas with the whole class and compile a list of working dogs. (e.g. *guide dog, gun dog, sheepdog, sniffer dog – for drugs, explosives, people, police dog, a husky dog pulls sledges in the snow* etc). Ask students to tell you about the working dogs in their country.
- d Then ask students to consider, on their own first, which of these working dogs they think is the most important, and why. Then ask them to share their ideas with another student. What do most students think?

Tip: create an interest in the topic

Students will be more interested in the reading having thought about what dogs can do to help people – even if they don't like dogs themselves.

- e Dictate the following paragraph headings in this order: *1 A War Dog, 2 An Intelligent Dog, 3 A Rocket Dog, 4 A Rescue Dog, 5 A Loyal Dog*. Spelling can be checked in pairs or as a class.
- f Ask for a synonym of loyal (*faithful, devoted*) and an antonym (*disloyal*).

Tip: try occasional dictations

Activities like this make great 'hidden' spelling tests!

2 First reading tasks

- a Tell students they are going to read about some dogs. Give each student a copy of the reading. They need to read as quickly as possible and decide where each of the headings they wrote down go. Once they have checked with another student, they can write in the heading.

Tip: motivate students to read more quickly

If you make the task a competition to see who can finish first, it may encourage students not to

worry about understanding all the words. Instead they can concentrate on the overall meaning. Do let them know though that they will read it all again more slowly. Make sure dictionaries are *not* available!

b Feedback: **A3, B5, C1, D4, E2.**

3 Second reading tasks

- a Hand out the reading task sheet. There are two sets of questions. The first set of questions requires students to read the text again for more detail. However, the answers still only require a general understanding of the text.
- b Feedback: **a** *Rob, Arcón, Bertie* **b** *Laika, Hachiko* **c** *Laika, Rob* **d** *all except Hachiko* **e** *students' own answers.*
- c Use the last answer as an opportunity for students to speak and voice their own opinions.
- d The answers to question 2 are not in the text. These questions require students to discuss together what they think the answer might be. Do the first one with the whole class as an example: *Why did Laika die?* Possible answers could be: *She was sad / afraid / ill / too hot.* Then students work together. Make sure they have enough time to think about the answers and make simple responses. Also check they are just speaking and not writing.

Tip: use questions for aiding and not testing comprehension

Questions that help students understand the text will give students more confidence in their reading skills, and perhaps motivate them to read more outside the classroom.

4 Post-reading tasks – vocabulary

- a Students have now looked at the text a number of times and it's possible that words that caused initial difficulties are now understood. Ask students to listen and read out the following line: *Along with the soldiers from his army unit Rob parachuted behind enemy lines ...* What part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb etc) is *parachuted*? How did the students, if they didn't know the word already, work out the meaning? What helped them? With luck they'll say *He jumped out of planes.*
- b Now do the same with the line *Gill is deaf.* What part of speech is the word *deaf*? How did they work out the meaning? There are two clues: *Bertie is her ears ... people with hearing difficulties.*
- c So it's possible for students to work out the meanings of some words without using a dictionary! Now ask them to look at the words in the table in question 3. They have to:
- find the word in the reading (the paragraph heading is in brackets).
 - decide what part of speech it is and write this in the table next to the word.
 - try and work out what the word could mean.
 - choose the correct meaning from the options given.

- d As always do an example with the whole class. Once all the students have found *cute* elicit that it's an adjective, get them to guess what it may mean and then choose an option (*pretty and attractive*).
- e Students then continue, either working individually and then checking with another student, or in pairs if they prefer. Other unknown words can be added to the table. There's also a suggested writing task.

Tip: encourage students to infer meaning from context

Reaching for a dictionary every time they meet an unknown word slows students down and prevents them from becoming efficient readers.