

Reading Explorer 1, Unit 2: Man's Best Friend

Dogs are often known as man's best friend. Many societies have them as pets, or rely on them to perform a variety of tasks. The story of man and dog is a complex story that goes back thousands of years, and will almost certainly go on for thousands more.

Dogs interact with humans in a variety of ways.

Dogs such as border collies are trained to herd livestock such as sheep. Huskies pull us through some of the coldest and most dangerous places on Earth. Dogs have a sense of smell 1000 times more powerful than our own. This means they can search for people who are lost under deep snow, or under the debris of a collapsed building, ... or deep in the forest. Beagles perform their duties at airports, where their sense of smell helps them to find drugs and other illegal items in peoples' luggage. They lead the blind, and help to ease the lives of disabled people.

For many, the dog is also an obedient companion — and friend. When did this remarkable partnership start?

We know now that the wolf began working with people in the distant past — roughly 14,000 years ago. Over the years, the wolf became the talented domestic pet we know as the dog.

There are plenty of theories, but the real reason why humans acquired dogs is still unknown. Was it because they needed to protect each other from harm? Was it a hunting partnership? Was it a need for companionship — a type of friendship? Or was it a combination of the three?

For 14,000 years the dog has played an important role in human societies. It's a partnership that's likely to continue for many years to come.