THE DOG THAT RODE THE SUBWAY ALONE

High-Interest Nonfiction Reading Passage

WHAT'S INCLUDED

✓ Reading Passage   ✓ Comprehension Questions
✓ Answer Key   ✓ Teacher Guide

GRADES 4-6 • LEXILE ~750L • DOK LEVELS 1-4

Reading they'll actually do.

TERMS OF USE

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WHAT'S INCLUDED

✓ High-interest nonfiction reading passage (300-400 words)

✓ 6 comprehension questions spanning DOK levels 1-4

✓ Complete answer key with explanations

✓ Teacher guide with standards, pacing, and extensions

Questions or feedback? Leave a review or message us through TPT!

THE DOG THAT RODE THE SUBWAY ALONE

Every morning in Moscow, stray dogs wake up in the quiet suburbs, stretch their legs, and commute to work. They walk to the nearest metro station, wait for the right train, ride into the busy city center, spend the day begging for food—and then take the subway back home at night.

It sounds like a children's story. But it's absolutely real, and scientists have been studying it for decades.

Moscow's stray dog population has lived in the city for over a century, surviving wars, famines, and brutal winters. Over generations, these dogs have developed remarkable urban survival skills—and none more impressive than their mastery of the metro system.

Researchers have documented the dogs using multiple navigation methods. Some appear to recognize stations by their unique smells—each platform has a distinct scent profile from nearby bakeries, restaurants, and shops. Others respond to the recorded announcements that play before each stop, lifting their heads when they hear their destination. A few seem to track travel time itself, knowing instinctively when to prepare for exit.

The most famous subway dog was Malchik, a black stray who rode the same route for years, greeting commuters at a central station. He became so beloved that when he was killed by a disturbed woman in 2001, thousands of Muscovites mourned. A bronze statue now stands in the station where he spent his days.

The behavior evolved because Moscow's suburbs offer safer sleeping—fewer crowds, quieter streets, more hiding spots—while the city center provides better begging opportunities. The dogs learned to bridge these two worlds by mastering human transportation.

But subway navigation is just one skill. These dogs have also developed sophisticated begging strategies. Some target children, who are more generous than adults. Others approach people actively eating rather than those walking empty-handed. A few packs even send their cutest, most appealing members forward to beg while larger, tougher-looking dogs wait nearby for a share.

These aren't lost pets waiting to be rescued. They're urban survivors who have built their own parallel society within the human one—complete with territories, social hierarchies, and daily commutes.

Word Count: 351 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: National Geographic

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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 **Why do Moscow's stray dogs ride the subway into the city center?**

○ A) To find warmer shelter during winter

○ B) To find better begging opportunities for food

○ C) To escape from predators in the suburbs

○ D) To be adopted by commuters

2 **What happened to the famous subway dog Malchik?**

○ A) He was adopted by a family

○ B) He died of old age

○ C) He was killed, and a statue was built in his memory

○ D) He got lost and never returned

3 **What does the word 'sophisticated' most likely mean in this passage?**

○ A) Simple and basic

○ B) Complex and cleverly developed

○ C) Loud and aggressive

○ D) Random and unpredictable

4 **Which detail from the passage best demonstrates that the dogs work together as a group?**

○ A) Some dogs recognize stations by smell

○ B) Malchik greeted commuters at a central station

○ C) Some packs send cute dogs to beg while tougher dogs wait for a share

○ D) The dogs have lived in Moscow for over a century

5 The passage describes three different ways dogs navigate the subway system. Explain two of these methods and what each one suggests about the dogs' intelligence.

_____

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6 The passage ends by saying these dogs have 'built their own parallel society within the human one.' What responsibilities, if any, do humans have toward these urban animal populations? Should cities help them, remove them, or leave them alone? Use evidence from the text and your own reasoning.

_____

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ANSWER KEY

The Dog That Rode the Subway Alone

1. B) To find better begging opportunities for food

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states 'the city center provides better begging opportunities' while 'suburbs offer safer sleeping.'

2. C) He was killed, and a statue was built in his memory

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states Malchik 'was killed by a disturbed woman' and 'a bronze statue now stands in the station where he spent his days.'

3. B) Complex and cleverly developed

DOK 2 — Vocabulary in context. The passage describes dogs targeting specific people, using different strategies, and working in teams—all suggesting complex, intelligent behavior.

4. C) Some packs send cute dogs to beg while tougher dogs wait for a share

DOK 2 — Text evidence. This detail shows cooperative behavior with assigned roles—clear evidence of group coordination.

5. Sample Response:

Two navigation methods: (1) Recognizing stations by smell—each platform has a 'distinct scent profile,' meaning dogs have learned to associate specific smells with specific locations, which requires memory and pattern recognition. (2) Responding to recorded announcements—dogs 'lift their heads when they hear their destination,' meaning they've learned to associate human language sounds with places, even though they don't understand the words. Both methods show the dogs can learn complex systems designed for humans.

6. Sample Response:

Answers will vary. Some might argue humans should help because we created urban environments that forced animals to adapt. Others might say the dogs are thriving without help—they have 'territories, social hierarchies, and daily commutes' showing independence. Still others might raise concerns about public health or safety. Strong responses will consider multiple perspectives, acknowledge complexity, and use evidence about the dogs' successful adaptation to support their position.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Dog That Rode the Subway Alone

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1 — Refer to details and examples in a text
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4 — Determine meaning of words and phrases
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8 — Explain how author uses evidence
- NGSS — Connections to scientific practices

PACING OPTIONS

- Quick Read (10-15 min): Passage + questions 1-4
- Standard (20-25 min): Full passage + all questions
- Deep Dive (35-40 min): Add discussion + extension

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Moscow's stray dogs built their own 'parallel society' with territories, hierarchies, and commutes. What does this suggest about animal intelligence?
- A statue was built for Malchik after his death. Why do we honor some animals this way? What makes an animal worthy of a monument?
- Should cities help stray animal populations, remove them, or leave them alone? What are the trade-offs?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Mapping: Draw a map showing how the dogs navigate between suburbs and city. Include their strategies.
- Research: Investigate how other urban animals have adapted to cities (pigeons, raccoons, coyotes). Create a comparison.
- Debate: Should cities help stray populations, remove them, or leave them alone? Research and defend a position.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Struggling: Pre-teach vocabulary, partner reading
- Advanced: Add research, compare to related events
- ELL: Visual supports, pre-teach context

SOURCE

- National Geographic / Penn State Research

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