Name: _____ Date: _____

Biscuit and Ask, Wait, Stroke

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 900 words

On Saturday morning, Nell and her gran walked down the lane to the village green, where the sun was warm and the grass smelled sweet. Nell loved dogs more than anything, and she hoped to meet every dog in the village. Then, beside the old stone well, she saw the happiest dog she had ever seen.

The dog was golden and shaggy, with a red scarf tied around his neck, and his body wiggled from his nose to his tail. His mouth hung open in a smile, and his eyes were soft. Nell wanted to run straight over and hug him. Her feet were already moving when Gran said, very quietly, "Nell. What do we do first?"

Nell stopped, because she knew the answer, even though it was hard to remember with a wiggly golden dog so close. "We ask the owner," she said. An old man sat on the bench with a leash in his hand. "Excuse me," said Nell, "may I pet your dog, please?" The man smiled and said, "This is Biscuit, and I am Mr. Finch. Yes, you may."

"Thank you for asking," said Biscuit, who could talk, of course, because he was a Peabody dog. "Most people just rush at me, and that makes me feel squashed, even when I like them. Now comes my favorite part, which is called Wait. Hold out your hand, low and closed like a little fist, and let me come to you."

Nell held out her fist and stayed as still as a statue while Biscuit stretched his neck and sniffed her knuckles. He sniffed for a long time, because a dog's nose is much better than ours, and a sniff is how a dog says hello. Then he stepped closer by himself and leaned on her knee. "Now I know you," he said.

"Here comes the last step, which is called Stroke," said Biscuit. "Please pet me gently on my shoulder or my chest, because most dogs do not like a hand coming down on the top of the head. Keep your hand slow and smooth." Nell stroked his shoulder, and his tail swept the grass. "Ask, Wait, Stroke," she said happily.

"Now I will tell you a secret," said Biscuit. "A dog talks with his whole body. When I am relaxed, my body is loose and wiggly, my eyes are soft, my mouth is open and easy, and my tail swings from side to side. If you see all of that, you can say hello, as long as you ask first. But if I turn my head away, it means that I would like you to stop."

They walked along the lane until they came to a garden gate, and behind a tall fence sat a small brown dog. His tail was tucked under him and his ears were pressed flat. He licked his lips and yawned, although he did not look sleepy, and his eyes were turned to the side so that the whites showed at the corners. "Biscuit," Nell whispered, "is that dog happy?"

"No, he is worried," said Biscuit softly. "A tucked tail, flat ears, licking lips, a yawn that is not a sleepy one, and whites showing in his eyes all say that he needs space. A wagging tail alone does not mean a dog is friendly, so you have to look at the whole dog. And you never reach over or through a fence." Nell stepped back and said, "Good luck, little dog."

At the end of the lane, a big gray dog lay asleep on a porch step, with a bowl of food beside him. "Never touch a dog who is sleeping or eating," said Biscuit, "because a sudden hand might frighten him. Let him rest and let him eat. If you want to pet him, you can ask his owner afterward." Nell tiptoed past, and Gran gave her a proud smile.

Just then a spotted dog came trotting across the green with no one at his side, and Nell's heart gave a thump. "Remember the plan," said Gran. Nell stood still and let her arms hang down. She did not run and she did not stare, but looked at the grass and breathed slowly, while Biscuit stood close beside her, calm and quiet.

The spotted dog sniffed the air and trotted on by, without even looking at Nell. "When a dog you do not know comes near, stay calm and still and let him pass," said Gran, taking her hand. "If he stays, back away slowly, and then tell a grown-up." Mr. Finch had been watching, and now he walked across the green to find the dog's owner.

A girl in a yellow coat ran up, laughing and out of breath, and clipped the leash on her dog. "Thank you, Mr. Finch," she said. "He got away from me." Nell watched them go with a calm heart. "I stayed still," she said. Biscuit leaned on her knee and answered, "Ask, Wait, Stroke, and watch the whole dog."

That afternoon Nell drew the three steps on a card and stuck it on her door, with a happy dog and a worried dog drawn side by side underneath. Gran said that she would learn them too. Outside in the lane, Biscuit's tail went thump, thump, thump. Ask a grown-up to look at Peabody Pets with you. You will find it at pet.peabody.kids.

Questions

1. What does Nell do first when she wants to pet Biscuit?

A. She holds out her hand
B. She asks the owner
C. She hugs Biscuit

2. What does "Wait" mean in Ask, Wait, Stroke?

A. Let the dog come and sniff your hand
B. Count to ten before you talk
C. Wait until the dog is asleep

3. Why does Biscuit say the small brown dog is worried?

A. He is barking at Nell
B. He is wagging his tail
C. His tail is tucked, his ears are flat and he licks his lips

4. In this story, what does calm mean?

A. Quiet and still
B. Loud and fast
C. Cold and wet

5. A dog you do not know comes near and nobody is with him. What should you do?

A. Run away fast
B. Stand still, stay calm and do not stare
C. Reach out and pet him

Words to know

relaxed: loose and calm
stroke: pet gently
worried: a bit scared
calm: quiet and still

Answer key: Biscuit and Ask, Wait, Stroke

1. B. She asks the owner
2. A. Let the dog come and sniff your hand
3. C. His tail is tucked, his ears are flat and he licks his lips
4. A. Quiet and still
5. B. Stand still, stay calm and do not stare