Name: _____ Date: _____

Five Needs, One Dog

Reading level 13 · 967 words

Dev was thirteen when his family brought home Moss, a gray, long-legged dog from a rescue. By the end of the first week, Dev had noticed something uncomfortable: he had been loving Moss without really knowing what Moss needed. So he copied a framework from an animal charity's website, which says that every pet owner must provide five things: a suitable environment, a suitable diet, the ability to behave naturally, company that suits the species, and protection from pain, injury and disease. He drew five columns on a sheet of paper and wrote Moss's name across the top. The same charity adds a warning that the needs of each type of pet are very different, so an owner has to learn them for the animal in front of him.

The first column was environment, and Dev began with the dullest item, sleep. He had assumed that a dog bed was a luxury, but then he read that rest is a real welfare need, and that a bed should sit somewhere quiet and draught-free, with a second option nearer the family. The advice is blunt: none of us like being disturbed while we sleep, and dogs are no different, so children in the house must learn to leave a dog alone in its bed. There is a safety reason behind that kindness. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that dogs may bite when they are not feeling well and want to be left alone, and that a dog which is hiding may be asking for exactly that.

The second column, diet, turned out to be where the experts disagree. One page from the ASPCA says that once a dog reaches its first birthday, one meal a day is usually enough. Another page from the same organization recommends feeding all dogs twice a day. Dev did not try to decide which page was right, because a British charity, PDSA, offered a more useful method: weigh each portion, feed for the dog's target weight, and do not leave food out all day, which for most dogs invites overeating. Treats should stay at five percent or less of a day's food, and a treat means a smaller dinner. Every source sent him back to the same person, the vet, who knows Moss's age, size and health.

Under behavior, Dev found an idea that changed how he saw Moss's worst habits. The ASPCA says that supervised play satisfies many of a dog's instinctual urges to dig, herd, chew, retrieve and chase. Exercise burns calories and stimulates the mind, and a bored dog is more likely to turn destructive. So the muddy hole beside the fence was not spite; it was an unmet need. The sources, however, will not give him one formula. One recommends thirty to sixty minutes a day, while another says activity should follow a dog's health, age, athleticism and individual needs. Dev wrote in the margin: watch Moss, not the clock, and ask the vet about his joints and his age.

The fourth column, company, made Dev think about Moss's senses and about how Moss sees

the family. The RSPCA reports that a dog's sense of smell is far superior to ours, that dogs can see better than people in dim light, and that they can detect sounds up to four times quieter than we can hear. Dogs also form strong social bonds with people and become very attached to particular ones. Many enjoy other dogs, though the word is many, not all. Dev realized that a ten-minute lap around the block, which was fast and quiet for him, was a slow and crowded experience of smells for Moss. He started letting him stop and sniff.

Health was the last column, and it was the one with the fewest things a child can do alone. Dev can brush Moss, watch him and keep his water fresh. The rest belongs to a vet and a grown-up. Vaccination is described by the RSPCA as one of the most important things to arrange in the first weeks. Some common foods are poisonous to dogs: chocolate, grapes and raisins, onions and garlic, and the sugar substitute xylitol. The PDSA admits that nobody can predict whether a particular dog will react badly to grapes, which is why the advice is always to phone the vet. Dev also learned a rule he had not expected: never give a dog medicine that a vet has not prescribed.

The chart had no column for reading a dog's body, but Dev added one anyway, because the sources agree on the method: look at the whole dog. A relaxed dog has loose shoulders, soft eyes and ears that are not pinned. A worried dog may tuck its tail, lick its lips repeatedly, yawn when it is not tired, turn its head away, or show the whites of its eyes. The ASPCA stresses that a wagging tail does not always mean friendliness. This matters because, according to the CDC, most dog bites affecting young children happen during everyday activities with familiar dogs. That is why supervision, and an owner who notices early signs, matter more than a dog's reputation.

On Sunday Dev taped the finished chart inside a kitchen cupboard. He had learned that the best owners do not simply have good feelings about their dogs. They ask what a dog needs, and who can answer the questions they cannot. Where the sources disagreed, he left a blank and wrote: ask the vet. Moss padded in, flopped onto the floor, and sighed, his shoulders loose and his eyes soft. Dev washed his hands with soap and water, as the CDC advises after handling a dog, its food or its dishes. Ask a grown-up to look at Peabody Pets with you. You will find it at pet.peabody.kids.

Questions

1. Why did Dev leave a blank on the chart where sources disagreed?

A. He did not read them

B. The right answer depends on the dog, so he would ask a vet

C. He wanted to copy another chart

2. According to the ASPCA, what can a dog's muddy digging mean?

A. An unmet need to dig and be busy
B. A need for more treats
C. A sign of spite

3. In this book, what does prescribed mean?

A. Cooked in a pan
B. Bought from a store
C. Written down by a vet for a dog

4. Why does the CDC say supervision matters even with familiar dogs?

A. Familiar dogs are always unfriendly
B. Dogs love an audience
C. Most bites to young children happen with familiar dogs in everyday moments

5. What is the safest way to read a dog's mood?

A. Look at the whole dog
B. Look only at the tail
C. Listen for barking

Words to know

welfare: well-being
instinctual: born into them
destructive: damaging things
prescribed: a vet ordered
vaccination: protective shot

Answer key: Five Needs, One Dog

1. B. The right answer depends on the dog, so he would ask a vet
2. A. An unmet need to dig and be busy
3. C. Written down by a vet for a dog
4. C. Most bites to young children happen with familiar dogs in everyday moments
5. A. Look at the whole dog