



Our Dogs, Ourselves Young Readers Edition: How We Live With Dogs
By Alexandra Horowitz

About the Book

Our Dogs, Ourselves—Young Readers Edition explores all things dogs, focusing on dog owners' relationships with their furry friends. From the time people first associated with wolves to the evolution of pet dogs, views on this species have changed dramatically. Do dogs love us? Are they property? Why do we buy them toys? How do we learn more about them? These questions and more are explored and explained as Alexandra Horowitz relays her research into the different ways we live with and relate to our dogs. Dogs have influenced our lives for thousands of years, and the author's analysis of the bond that dogs and people have for one another is both thoughtful and surprising.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the human-dog relationship. What are the defining factors? Why do humans and dogs rely so heavily on each other? What human-dog relationships have you seen in your own life or community?
2. Would you like to work at a Dog Cognition Lab, or enroll your dog as a subject there? Explain your answers.
3. Identify reasons dogs should have rights, and support these with facts from the book. Which do you think is most compelling? Are there any other reasons you might add from any personal experiences?

4. What do you think about the ability to clone a pet dog? What are the implications? Would you consider doing this? Explain your answers.
5. What would you name a dog if you had the opportunity? Why would you choose that name? Do you think a name is important?
6. How did Plato define being human, and how has that definition changed over time? Can you think of any other ways to define being human? Explain your answers.
7. Why didn't the Yurok Indians of California name their dogs? Why might they think this way?
8. Why did people begin to domesticate dogs? Why was this an important development?
9. Name something you say to your dog or have heard friends say to theirs. Why do you think people talk to their dogs? Why do they make them such big parts of their families?
10. Explain the differences between purebreds and mutts.
11. What would be your choice for a purebred dog? Why would you choose that particular breed? Do you think your choice would affect your relationship to the dog?
12. Why do you think the author included statistics about the Dog Cognition Lab in chapter eleven? Which statistic most surprised you? Which one did you like best? Which would you like to learn more about?
13. What does it take to become a responsible pet owner? Do you think people who neglect or harm dogs should be allowed to have pets?
14. What are your thoughts on dressing up dogs? How does your answer compare to the author's point of view? Did she impact the way you feel about this?

15. Many dog shelters euthanize the animals if they aren't adopted after a certain amount of time. How do you feel about this practice? What would you like to see happen? Explain your thoughts.

16. What sorts of problems are associated with spaying and neutering dogs? Do you think the overall outcome justifies the procedure? Are there alternative actions people can take?

17. Identify what dogs need to live well and be satisfied. Do you agree with the author's analysis? Explain your answer.

18. What did people feed their dogs before pet food came along? Do you think dogs are better off with food developed especially for them?

19. Do you think dogs feel emotions? Give an example of what people perceive as an emotion in dogs. How does the author feel about dogs and emotions?

Extension Activities

Property or Not?

Hold a debate on whether dogs should be considered property or family. Set up a panel with equal numbers of debaters on each side, and defend your arguments in front of an audience of classmates.

Pure Breeds

Research characteristics of a particular purebred dog. What are the pros and cons of that breed? Write an essay identifying and explaining the American Kennel Club characteristics and qualities of that breed.

A Special Dog

Research and read more about Horand von Grafrath on sites like <https://www.total-german-shepherd.com/Horand.html>. What was significant about this dog? List the things that made Horand special, and explain why he was such a source of intrigue.

Best of Kind

Choose one category of dogs, such as herders, good with children, or toy-sized. Design a chart showing examples of dogs within that category, including their traits and characteristics. Do they overlap in many ways? What makes some better suited for certain people than others? What advice would you give to new dog owners looking to make the best selection?

Dog Accessory

Design a dog accessory, and draw a picture of it. Then explain why it's necessary, how it works, and how it would help people or their dogs. What needs does it fulfill? How will it make the dog or its owners' lives easier?

It's a Treat!

Look up a recipe for homemade dog treats. Make it for your dog or a friend's dog, and see how they like it. How did you decide what recipe to try? Are there health benefits? Does it include ingredients highly recommended for dogs?

It's for the Dogs

Research the development of commercial pet foods manufactured especially for dogs. Make a time line to show your information. This site may help: <https://www.thefarmersdog.com/digest/the-history-of-commercial-pet-food-a-great-american-marketing-story/>. How can pet owners make informed decisions about what to buy their dogs? How has the process become simpler or more complicated?

This curriculum guide was prepared by Shirley Duke. She is a former science teacher and author of many science books for children as well as a freelance science writer.

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