

Read with Your Young Reader Guide

Using *What the Dog Knows* and *What the Dog Knows Young Readers Edition*
By Cat Warren



About the books

Researchers have only just begun to understand dogs' olfactory abilities. The mystery deepens with scent-detection dogs. What started as a hobby to train her unruly German shepherd puppy transformed into a passion, as Cat Warren, a science journalism professor, started to train Solo as a cadaver dog and to learn about the complex world of scent-detection dogs, which she chronicled in *What the Dog Knows*. Her newest book, *What the Dog Knows Young Readers Edition*, brings these captivating stories and facts alive for middle-grade readers. It focuses on the energetic Solo and his keen nose, as he goes through cadaver dog training and beyond. The book highlights a variety of working dogs whose skills and abilities help people everywhere. Now, adults can read side by side with their young readers, learning the stories behind the science and sharing the experience through the discussion questions below.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Solo adjust to his new home with Cat and her husband, David? How can you tell? Does this remind you of any experiences you've had with a new family pet or moving to a new neighborhood?
2. Describe Cat and Solo's early cadaver-dog training, and how that changes their relationship. How does Cat know when Solo is ready to try something on his own? Why might it be difficult for her to let him work independently? Think about what happens when you're ready to embark on a new challenge. How can the people around you help you feel supported? How can you help others feel the same?

3. Which do you like best: learning about Cat and Solo's personal stories, or discovering facts about dogs and what they can do? Discuss your answers. Which aspects of Cat's life with Solo or areas of dog training would you like to learn more about? Where might you look for that information?
4. If you had a dog, would you train them to be a scent-detection dog if you had the time and opportunity? Which of the many scent-detection jobs would you hope they'd be well suited for? How would you make sure they learned the skills and stayed healthy and active?
5. Think about the importance of communication between a search dog and their handler. How do Cat and Solo work together and understand each other? How would you rate your own communication skills with a pet or an animal that you know? Discuss how you act in different environments: school, work, home, activities.
6. What most surprises you about scent-detection dogs? Share your favorite scene from the young readers or adult edition, and why it stayed with you.
7. What do you think about the development of robotic dogs and e-noses? How might these inventions impact the future uses of scent-detection dogs like Solo? Do you think the new technologies are as reliable as real dogs?
8. Pretend you get to interview Cat and take pictures of Solo for your local paper. What questions would you ask her? Where would you want to photograph Solo? Will your article be about one detailed experience with Solo, or an overall view of his training and work? Read the passages in the Notes and Extra Reading and Viewing section of the young readers edition that describe "off-the-record" and "deep background" interviews. Would you want to do other interviews with anyone else who interacted with Cat and Solo? If so, how would you go about asking questions of those people?
9. Think about the work that goes into writing a nonfiction book, and what makes it different from a fiction novel. If you were to write a nonfiction book, what would it be about? Would it be half memoir, half research-and-reporting-based, like *What the Dog Knows*? What personal memories would you include? How would you go about researching? What topics do you know a lot about?
10. Visit Cat Warren's website, www.catwarren.com, to watch videos of Cat's training with Solo and read Cat's blog. How does this material add to your reading experience?

Q&A with Cat Warren:

Q: Which parts of your experiences are you most excited to share with kids?

A: I'm excited about sharing lots of my experiences with Solo! Dogs teach me so much about the world. Being able to watch and think about how a particular dog experiences the world—and how he uses his nose and eyes and ears—is especially interesting. Every dog, like every person, is different. Learn how to understand and appreciate that dog, and help him and you have the best possible life together, no matter what that dog does for work—even if their main roles are playing and living with you. That's why dogs are our best friends.

Q: What about science, psychology, or animals most interested you as you were growing up? What topics or areas of study do you use as an adult in your career?

A: When I was growing up, I was surrounded by Irish setters and English setters. Those dogs were bred to see a game bird, like a pheasant or a quail, and freeze. They were both energetic and gentle at the same time. If they saw any bird or a rabbit or squirrel, nothing else existed. One time, we were raising baby pheasants in our living room in a small pen. Our setters were so happy. They'd lie next to the pen, still as stones. Except for the time one of the chicks escaped. The next thing I saw was an Irish setter standing there with a wet and angry pheasant chick in her mouth. The chick was fine! Irish setters have very soft mouths.

It fascinated me as a child to see the difference between our dogs, and our neighbor's German shepherd, who lay in front of their house and watched over us when we played there. She barked ferociously if she didn't recognize a car coming up the drive. But she didn't chase wildlife. She wasn't interested.

But our neighbor's dogs, who lived even farther up the road? They were fox terriers who liked to chase small animals, even raccoons, and kill them if there was a chance. They were such tough and ferocious little dogs. Not with people, though. Think about it. All these different breeds of dogs, and all of them interested in different things!

Yet, ultimately, all loved their humans most of all.

Q: What do you understand now about dogs and their abilities that you wish you would have known when you were younger?

A: I think I wish I was younger again! Because when I was in grade school and middle school, I thought that dogs could do almost anything. I loved spending time with them almost more than spending time with people! But I set some of those feelings aside when I got a bit older and went to college, and then off to work. Life got so busy that I couldn't spend hours a day with dogs, except when I was home at night and sleeping. With Solo, those feelings came back! Once again, I got to watch dogs and truly be alongside them. And I got to think about what makes a dog happy. And in turn that made me happy.

Q: What content from the adult edition did you decide to focus on for the young readers edition?

A: I had a lot of stories in the adult edition that I removed partly because the book got long and more complicated with those stories. It was fun to kind of streamline for the young readers edition. That meant focusing more on Solo. And I also was a bit lazy! I took the advice of several young readers who read the adult book and then told me what bored them.

Q: Does your young readers edition describe experiences that aren't mentioned in your adult book?

A: It does. I didn't want to leave out experiences like Solo and me taking a test so that we could go on real searches. I got wet and cold, but Solo was wet and happy.

In another instance, I had only briefly described the experience of Solo searching in an African-American cemetery. I expanded that section, and I was able to go back and do more research on one of the headstones in that cemetery. It was both a wonderful and sad experience for me when Solo and I did the search. It felt even more amazing to find the census report on a woman who was a slave, and then emancipated, who was buried in that cemetery. Solo had found her location and headstone for me. I found some of her history in documents. It felt like another example of us getting to work together and bring our strengths together: his good nose, and my love of digging into research.