

The Story of Man's Best Friend

This Primer on *The Story of Man's Best Friend* will start by exploring the origin of today's popular pooches and move on to take a look at interesting breeds, hero dogs and dogs that work to make our lives safer. While you might already know a lot about this topic you will find that there is always something new to learn!

Start the Discussion:

Have you ever had a dog? How was your dog special? What is the best part of owning a dog?

Throughout history, dogs have played an important role in the daily life of humans. From the earliest days, dogs have had practical uses. They were kept because they could

Primer

The History of Dogs

help with hunting, guarding, and herding. Dogs vary in size, shape and behavior more than any other living mammal, but most experts believe that all dogs, no matter how different, originated exclusively from a single species; the gray wolf. People have been breeding dogs since pre-historic times. They were bred for the specific traits needed for the work expected of them. For a majority of their existence, dogs were bred to be faster, stronger, more obedient and docile, better workers and even better smellers. An example of one of the earliest breeds believed to be selected for its ability to chase fast prey is still around today, the Greyhound.

Did you Know?

In 1620, when the pilgrims boarded the Mayflower and began their journey to the New World there were two dogs on board. Pilgrim John Goodman, a 25-year-old Mayflower passenger, brought his Mastiff and English Springer Spaniel along for

the voyage. These dogs have been recognized in history for helping the pilgrims establish their settlement on Cape Cod. Goodman's dogs became essential members of the settlement, providing protection and accompanying their owner on hunts. One January day Goodman and fellow pilgrim Peter Browne took a team of men into the wilderness to collect materials for thatch roofing. The two got separated from the group and as it grew dark, Goodman, Browne, and the two dogs gathered close together for warmth. It was cold and snowy, and the men had wandered a full five miles off course. The following morning, with the help of his dogs, Goodman and his companion tracked their way back towards their village. They reached the camp around nightfall, half-frozen and hungry. Without the Mastiff and Spaniel, the men likely would not have survived the night.

A little about these breeds and why they would have been important to these colonists:

The Mastiff is one of the largest breeds. They are powerful and courageous but also gentle and loyal companions who enjoy the company

of their owners. Mastiffs were raised in Britain for more than 2,000 years and were employed by nobility as hunting and guard dogs.

The English Springer Spaniel is a medium-sized hunting dog known for its eagerness and ability to scare up a large variety of game birds as well as rabbits. Cheerful and affectionate, Springers love their families and like to stick close to their owners.

Jean Leon Gerome Ferris, painter of United States history, included the English Springer Spaniel in his painting of the pilgrims' famous meal with the native Wampanoag tribe. (See painting on the last page*) Domestication of dogs in America began when Native Americans were able to train wolves. The wolves learned that they could get a meal if they hung around humans, and Native Americans understood that wolves could be helpful to them.

Many uniquely American dog species were bred by Native Americans, and while most of them are now extinct, they are a part of the ancestry of the modern breeds.

As more and more colonists made their way to the New World,

they brought with them European breeds. Dogs had long been bred in Europe for hunting and sport and were brought along with the Spanish, French, and British colonists. European dogs mixed with American dogs and were further domesticated and bred for specialized purposes.

Mans Best Friend

Over time, the most common reason for owning a dog began to have less to do with survival and more to do with companionship. In recent years, there's been a growing awareness of the positive effects this relationship can have on human health and psychological well-being. Evidence shows that dogs help people live a healthier and happier life. Dogs have been shown to improve their humans' cardiovascular and mental health by reducing blood pressure, increasing exercise, and decreasing stress and anxiety levels. They have also been shown to help in the treatment of depression and grief.

Even though dogs were first domesticated thousands of years ago, most dog breeds were developed within the last 200 years. Over time, because of natural mutations,

climate and human preferences, breeds became more numerous and specialized. They are now formally classified based on the abilities of a breed in five skills: hunting, shepherding, guarding, work and company.

Standards for breed recognition vary from country to country. In the United States, the American Kennel Club currently recognizes 193 breeds. Recently, however the number of deliberately crossbred dogs has been growing. These include the labradoodle, which is a cross between a Labrador and a poodle, the cockapoo, which is a cross between a cocker spaniel and a poodle and the puggle which is a cross between a pug and a beagle.

The next Primer will discuss some of the most popular breeds of dogs and what makes them unique.

For Discussion:

“Man’s best friend” is a common phrase, referring to the dogs history of close loyalty and companionship with humans. The first recorded use of the phrase is by Frederick the Great of Prussia. However, the phrase became popular when it was used in a poem by Ogden Nash and has since become a common expression.

Discuss this humorous poem written by Ogden Nash.

*They bury bones in hideaways
And half the time they trot sideways.*

*Dogs in the country have fun.
They run and run and run.
But in the city this species
Is dragged around on leashes.*

*Dogs are upright as a steeple
And much more loyal than people.
Well people may be reprehensibler
But that’s probably because they are
sensibler.*

***An Introduction to Dogs
by Ogden Nash***

*The dog is man’s best friend.
He has a tail on one end.
Up in front he has teeth.
And four legs underneath.*

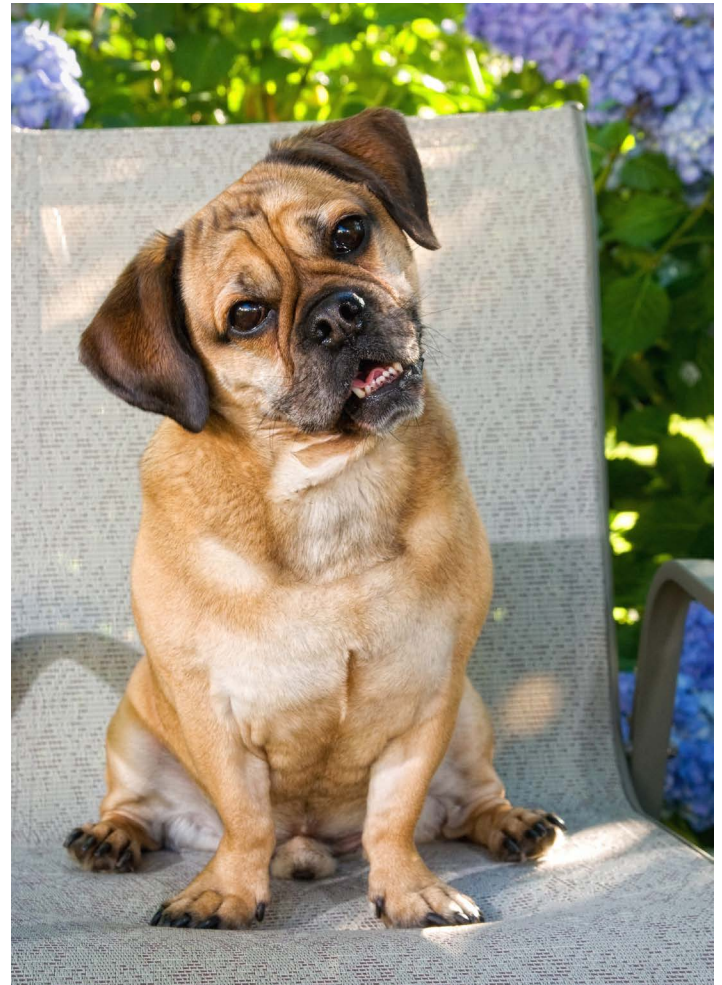
*Dogs like to bark.
They like it best after dark.
They not only frighten prowlers away
But also hold the sandman at bay.*

*A dog that is indoors
To be let out implores.
You let him out and what then?
He wants back in again.*

*Dogs display reluctance and wrath
If you try to give them a bath.*



Clockwise from above:
Mastiff, Springer Spaniel,
Puggle, Labradoodle,
Cockapoo, Greyhound





The First Thanksgiving by Jean Leon G. Ferris 1912