

Story Elements

Reading Comprehension

Directions Read the following selections. Then answer the questions that follow.

from Winter Dog
Alistair MacLeod

Through the window and out on the white plane of the snow, the silent, laughing children now appear. They move in their muffled clothes like mummets on the whitest of stages. They dance and gesture noiselessly, flopping their arms in parodies of heavy, happy, earthbound birds. They have been warned by the eldest to be aware of the sleeping neighbors so they cavort only in pantomime, sometimes raising mittened hands to their mouths to suppress their joyous laughter. They dance and prance in the moonlight, tossing snow in one another's direction, tracing out various shapes and initials, forming lines which snake across the previously unmarked whiteness. All of it in
10 silence, unknown and unseen and unheard to the neighboring world. They seem unreal even to me, their father, standing at his darkened window. It is almost as if they have danced out of the world of folklore like happy elves who cavort and mimic and caper through the private hours of this whitened dark, only to vanish with the coming of the morning's light and leaving only the signs of their activities behind. I am tempted to check the recently vacated beds to confirm what perhaps I think I know.

Then out of the corner of my eye I see him. The golden collie-like dog. He appears almost as if from the wings of the stage or as a figure newly noticed in the lower corner of a winter painting. He sits quietly and watches the playful
20 scene before him and then, as if responding to a silent invitation, bounds into its midst. The children chase him in frantic circles, falling and rolling as he doubles back and darts and dodges between their legs and through their outstretched arms. He seizes a mitt loosened from its owner's hand, and tosses it happily in the air and then snatches it back into his jaws an instant before it reaches the ground and seconds before the tumbling bodies fall on the emptiness of its expected destination. He races to the edge of the scene and lies facing them, holding the mitt tantalizingly between his paws, and then as they dash towards him, he leaps forward again, tossing and catching it before him and zigzagging through them as the Sunday football player might return the
30 much sought-after ball. After he has gone through and eluded them all, he looks back over his shoulder and again, like an elated athlete, tosses the mitt high in what seems like an imaginary end zone. Then he seizes it once more and lopes in a wide circle around his pursuers, eventually coming closer and closer to them until once more their stretching hands are able to actually touch his shoulders and back and haunches, although he continues always to wriggle free. He is touched but never captured, which is the nature of the game. Then he is gone. As suddenly as he came. I strain my eyes in the direction of the adjoining street, towards the house where I have often seen him, always within a yard

40 enclosed by woven links of chain. I see the flash of his silhouette, outlined perhaps against the snow or the light cast by the street lamps or the moon. It arcs upwards and seems to hang for an instant high above the top of the fence and then it descends on the other side. He lands on his shoulder in a fluff of snow and with a half roll regains his feet and vanishes within the shadow of his owner's house.

“What are you looking at?” asks my wife.

“That golden collie-like dog from the other street was just playing with the children in the snow.”

“But he's always in that fenced-in yard.”

50 “I guess not always. He jumped the fence just now and went back in. I guess the owners and the rest of us think he's fenced in but he knows he's not. He probably comes out every night and leads an exciting life. I hope they don't see his tracks or they'll probably begin to chain him.”

“What are the children doing?”

“They look tired now from chasing the dog. They'll probably soon be back in. I think I'll go downstairs and wait for them and make myself a cup of coffee.”

“Okay.”

I look once more towards the fenced-in yard but the dog is nowhere to be seen.

From “Winter Dog,” from *Island: Complete Stories* by Alistair MacLeod.

Copyright © 2000 by Alistair MacLeod.

Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. and McClelland & Stewart, Inc.

COMPREHENSION

Directions Answer the following questions about the excerpt from “Winter Dog.”

1. What is the point of view of this story?
2. Identify the strongest conflict in the story.
3. Which mood is created by the details in line 1?
4. In line 1, *plane* means
5. Based on lines 8-10, what can you infer?
6. The details in the excerpt tell you that the setting is
7. Which detail is a clue to the time of day in the setting?
8. In line 37, *strain* means
9. The author's purpose is to
10. What does the mitten symbolize?
11. What is the theme of the story?

12. What is the climax of the story?

A Long Partnership: People and Dogs

Mark Fitzgerald

A familiar saying describes dogs as “man’s best friend.” Dogs are certainly our oldest friends. The human partnership with dogs is thousands of years old. It was the first one we formed with another animal species. Descended from wolves, dogs were the first animals domesticated by humans. Evidence from fossils shows that wolves and early humans had already lived close to one another for tens of thousands of years before the partnership between them became firmly established toward the end of the last Ice Age. As animals, there were clear similarities between humans and wolves. Both were hunters, both hunted in packs, and both had complex social relationships based on loyalty to the pack. Ice Age humans would have seen wolves as much more like themselves than solitary hunters such as bears.

This relationship between wolves and humans probably began in more than one way. Imagine an encampment of Ice Age humans at nightfall huddled around their fire at the opening of a rock shelter. The firelight glitters in the eyes of wolves lurking in the darkness to scavenge some scraps of food. Becoming dependent on human scraps, such wolves might gradually have become less fierce and more trusting. Another possibility is that humans started the partnership by adopting—or stealing—wolf cubs. Raised with people, such wolves would transfer their loyalty to their new human “pack.”

As members of human groups, wolf dogs would have been very valuable. Their experience of hunting in a pack would have made wolf dogs very useful to bands of nomadic human hunters in tracking and bringing down the large animals of the Ice Age. Much later, when human beings had learned how to plant grain and started farming villages, wolf dogs—fully tamed by now—became watchdogs. As humans domesticated other animals, such as cattle and sheep, dogs also became important in managing herds.

The ancient peoples of the Mediterranean Sea region, such as the Greeks and Romans, both loved and respected the dogs that formed part of their households. A famous early picture of the companionship between a human and a dog is in the epic poem *The Odyssey*, by the ancient Greek poet Homer. Homer describes the meeting between the hero Odysseus, king of the island of Ithaca, and his hunting dog Argus. Odysseus has returned to his home after an absence of twenty years. He is disguised as a ragged beggar because a group of men have seized his palace. Argus, whom Odysseus had raised as a puppy, is lying outside the palace, old, neglected, and near death. However, Argus still recognizes his former master and wags his tail before dying. Unseen by anyone around him,

Odysseus brushes away a tear at this show of loyalty by his former hunting companion.

The Romans, like other ancient peoples, made use of dogs in war. The most valuable dog for combat purposes was the large hound that the Romans called a *molossus*. Perhaps related to the modern mastiff, these Roman dogs were huge, fierce animals with powerful jaws. Wearing padded, leather armor to protect it from arrows and spears, a molossus fought along alongside Roman soldiers, attacking enemy troops and horses. Such hounds were also highly valued as watchdogs.

50 At the other extreme in size and temperament from the Roman war dogs were the tiny, pampered lapdogs that upper-class Roman women often kept as pets. The fashion for toy dogs such as the Romans had liked as pets later became widespread in Europe. The tinier these animals were, the more they were prized. For example, in a famous French fairy tale, the three sons of a king compete in a series of tests to see who will inherit the throne of their father. Their first test is to find the smallest possible dog.

Humans spread around the globe, and they took their dogs with them. In the end, dogs became the only domestic animals found nearly everywhere humans live. Take a look at the Western Hemisphere long ago. Before they got horses, some Native Americans used their dogs as
60 beasts of burden. Through the fierce heat and dry dust of summer on the Great Plains, bands of Native Americans traveled slowly from camp to camp following the buffalo herds. To move their baggage, the Plains Indians had their dogs drag a *travois*, a framework of long poles lashed together with sinew. Such dogs might pull loads of up to a hundred pounds five or six miles a day.

The basic qualities of intelligence, courage, and loyalty that humans have always valued in dogs during their long partnership with them are still prized today. Humans still use dogs to hunt and herd animals. Dogs still go to war. And
70 dogs are still prized for their beauty and enjoyed as companions. The age-old partnership will continue as long as there are people and dogs.

COMPREHENSION

Directions Answer the following questions about “A Long Partnership: People and Dogs.”

13. Based on paragraph 1, the author’s purpose is to explain
14. The details of setting in paragraph 2 describe
15. The details of imagery in paragraph 4 about Argus create a mood of
17. Which imagery in paragraph 6 pictures the pets of upper-class Roman women?

COMPREHENSION

Directions Answer the following questions about both selections.

18. Compare the author's purpose in "Winter Dog" and "A Long Partnership: People and Dogs."
- A. Both are meant to entertain.
 - B. The first passage entertains; the second informs.
 - C. The first passage informs; the second entertains.
 - D. Both are meant to inform.

Short Answer Written Response

SHORT RESPONSE

Directions Write two or three sentences to answer each question.

20. Describe the characteristics of the narrator in "Winter Dog." Use details from the text to support your ideas.
21. How does the narrator of "A Long Partnership" feel about dogs? Use details from the text to support your answer.