

Canine suicide puzzle (Sun 6 Mar, 2005)

WARM-UPS

CHAT: Talk in pairs or groups about dogs / suicide / haunted houses / BBC TV / strange animal behaviour / lemmings / pets / ...Change topic / partner frequently to energize the class.

DOG BRAINSTORM: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word 'dog'. Share your words with your partner / group and talk about them.

ANSWERS: Which of the following reasons do you think is the answer to this mystery? Please add your own reason to the list before you begin. Give a mark of 1 to 10 for each reason: 1 = very probable, 10 = no way.

- a. A ghost dog from the haunted house is telling the dogs to jump.
- b. The dogs have had enough of the stresses of modern life and decided to end it all.
- c. A wicked person is standing beneath the bridge with the biggest, most aromatic juicy bone they've ever smelled.
- d. The dogs were abused by their owners and couldn't take any more.
- e. There are trees below the bridge. The tops of the trees look like solid ground to the dogs when they jump into thin air.
- f. A mysterious virus has got into the dog food that gives dogs suicidal tendencies.
- g. Scottish dogs want to start canine bungee jumping.
- h. Dogs can smell or hear something that humans can't, that makes them leap from the bridge.
- i. Each dog has recently lost its partner and is too sad to continue living.
- j. The dogs are part of a canine suicide cult.

2-MINUTE DEBATES: Rotate pairs to ensure a lively pace and noise level is kept:

- a. Dogs are better than cats. vs. Other way around.
- b. A dog is man's best friend. vs. A person is man's (and woman's) best friend.
- c. Dogs bite children and are dangerous. vs. Owners who do not train their dogs are dangerous.
- d. Dogs are dirty. They have fleas. vs. Your bed has fleas.
- e. Dogs should not be kept as pets. vs. Dogs have been kept as pets for thousands of years.
- f. People spend more money on dogs than on giving money to charity – that's wrong. vs. That's personal choice.
- g. Dogs are the cutest animals in the world. vs. Koalas are cuter.
- h. Dogs don't need coats and beauty parlors. vs. Dogs like to look good too.
- i. Dogs are cleaner than most children. Vs. That's a terrible thing to say.

PRE-READING IDEAS

WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... of the words 'dog' and 'lover'.

TRUE FALSE: Guess whether the following statements about the article are true or false:

- a. There is a new computer game called "Canine Suicide Puzzle". T / F
- b. Dog lovers in Scotland don't understand the answer to something. T / F
- c. Five dogs jumped to their deaths from a "haunted" bridge. T / F
- d. The bridge is next to a mansion used for a TV horror series. T / F
- e. The dogs were chasing bees and accidentally jumped from the bridge. T / F
- f. Dogs often commit suicide. T / F
- g. Dogs are fully able to understand heights, just as humans are. T / F
- h. Dog owners have been advised to avoid the bridge when walking their dogs. T / F

SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| (a) suicide | jumped |
| (b) puzzling | recommended |
| (c) leaped | rare |
| (d) haunted | prompting |
| (e) distressed | spooky |
| (f) abnormal | unnatural |
| (g) triggering | end it all |
| (h) unheard of | solved |
| (i) advised | upset |
| (j) cleared up | baffling |

PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases based on the article:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (a) commit | a beeline for the bridge |
| (b) the puzzling question | at this abnormal behaviour |
| (c) animal | death |
| (d) haunted | behaviourists |
| (e) the dog suddenly made | suicide |
| (f) jumped to its | of |
| (g) psychologists are baffled | their own lives |
| (h) no reason to take | mansion |
| (i) something unheard | cleared up |
| (j) until this mystery has been | being asked by dog lovers |

GAP FILL

Canine suicide puzzle

BNE: Can dogs _____ suicide? That is the puzzling question being asked by dog lovers and animal behaviourists today in a small town in Scotland. At least five dogs are known to have _____ 13 metres to their deaths from a bridge in the town of Dumbarton. The bridge is now _____ as Rover's Leap and is next to a supposedly haunted mansion built in 1863, which was used as the location for a BBC TV series called Tales from the Madhouse. The latest suicidal canine completely _____ its owner by suddenly making a _____ for the bridge and jumping to its death. Animal psychologists are baffled at this abnormal behaviour and are keen to understand what is _____ it. Dogs are not like lemmings, which jump to their deaths in thousands, but are fully able to understand _____, just as humans are. Dogs would also have no reason to take their own lives – something unheard of in the canine world, especially happy pet dogs from good families. All dog owners in the area have been advised to keep their dogs on a leash when they approach the bridge in _____, until this mystery has been cleared up.

known heights commit future beeline leaped triggering distressed

DISCUSSION:

- a. What was interesting in this article?
- b. Are you a dog lover?
- c. Why do you think the dogs are jumping?
- d. Is it possible for a dog to want to commit suicide?
- e. Do you believe in ghosts?
- f. Are you afraid of heights?
- g. What do you make a beeline for in a candy shop or department store?
- h. Have you known or heard of any strange dog behaviour?
- i. What is the best kind of pet to have?
- j. What would you do to research the causes for these canine 'suicides'?
- k. Would you take your dog for a walk on the bridge?
- l. Would you spend one night alone in the haunted mansion?
- m. Teacher / Student additional questions.

HOMEWORK

- 1. VOCAB EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.
- 2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find information on lemmings and their suicidal behaviour. Share your findings with your class next lesson.
- 3. SPOOKY STORY:** Write your own spooky story about a dog. Share it with your class next lesson.
- 4. LETTER TO DOG OWNER:** Write a letter to one of the dog owners telling him / her how you feel about this mystery.

FULL TEXT

Canine suicide puzzle

BNE: Can dogs **commit** suicide? That is the puzzling question being asked by dog lovers and animal behaviourists today in a small town in Scotland. At least five dogs are known to have **leaped** 13 metres to their deaths from a bridge in the town of Dumbarton. The bridge is now **known** as Rover's Leap and is next to a supposedly haunted mansion built in 1863, which was used as the location for a BBC TV series called Tales from the Madhouse. The latest suicidal canine completely **distressed** its owner by suddenly making a **beeline** for the bridge and jumping to its death. Animal psychologists are baffled at this abnormal behaviour and are keen to understand what is **triggering** it. Dogs are not like lemmings, which jump to their deaths in thousands, but are fully able to understand **heights**, just as humans are. Dogs would also have no reason to take their own lives – something unheard of in the canine world, especially happy pet dogs from good families. All dog owners in the area have been advised to keep their dogs on a leash when they approach the bridge in **future**, until this mystery has been cleared up.