

English Language Arts

READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 1

DIRECTIONS

This session contains three reading selections with fifteen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

Rico is a border collie with an unusual talent. Read the article to find out what scientists discovered about Rico. Answer the questions that follow.

Rico, a Dog of Many Words

by Jeanne Miller



1 The words Panda, Oscar, and Jumbo may mean nothing to your dog, but to Rico, a border collie from Germany, they're the names of objects in an everlasting game of fetch. Ever since he was 10 months old, Rico's owners have played a game with him using a variety of children's toys, balls, and other items. Now 9, Rico recognizes the names of about 200 objects and can retrieve them on command.

2 Three years ago, he performed this stunt on a German television game show and caught the attention of scientists at the Max Planck

Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany. They asked his owners for permission to test him and then designed trials to explore what he could do.

3 First, they laid out 10 of his playthings in a room. Out of sight in another room, his owner asked him for one of the objects by name. When he brought that one to her, she rewarded him and asked for another. After he had brought the second one, the researchers laid out a different set of 10 toys and repeated the process. They did this 20 times, using 200 playthings that he knew by name and asking for two of the ten objects in each trial. He successfully retrieved 37 of the 40 objects requested.

4 In the next series of trials, they did something different. They put out eight toys: a blue dinosaur, a ball, a Santa doll, and five others. Seven of them were familiar to him. The eighth — a stuffed bunny — he'd never seen before. From the other room, his owner called in German, "Rico! Where is the *T. rex*?" After a little uncertainty, Rico grabbed a familiar dinosaur and raced with it to her. Next, she asked for the Santa Claus. The dog snatched up the red doll and took it to her. Then, she asked for the "sirikid," a made-up word he'd never heard before. After

looking at all the toys again, Rico went back to his owner with nothing in his mouth. She repeated the question: "Where is the sirikid?" Rico returned to the room with the toys, looked at them again, and then seized the bunny and carried it to his owner.

5 This trial was repeated nine times, using, in all, 70 familiar objects and 10 unfamiliar ones. Seven times out of 10, Rico brought the unknown object when he heard the unknown word. Tested later, Rico continued to associate the same new word with the correct new object.

6 For Rico to connect the strange name with the strange toy suggests learning processes humans use when acquiring language for the first time. Experiments have shown that most children nearing age 2 will begin to make the same connection. An experimenter might put two objects in front of the child, perhaps a teddy bear and a potato masher, and ask, "May I have the bloof?" Most 2-year-olds, on hearing the nonsense word, will choose the unfamiliar object — in this case the potato masher — because they know that the other object — the teddy bear — has a different name.

7 Just how far Rico's language ability goes, though, is still unknown. His owners say that he can follow directions to put a named toy in a box or to give it to a certain person. The researchers are planning to test this.

8 Is Rico a special dog? He may be, but being a border collie gives him an advantage. For more than a century, border collies have been bred to be working dogs, outstanding in their ability to herd sheep. Donald McCaig, a Virginia sheep farmer and vice president of the American Border Collie Association, says that the breed is "exceptionally biddable, 'trainable,' and sensitive to cues. At distances of more than a mile, the shepherd's whistled commands are fainter than bird songs, yet the dog strains to distinguish them and do as bid."

9 Rico is a pet rather than a working dog, but his owners spend four to five hours a day playing with him. "Border collies give back what they get," says McCaig, so it's no surprise that Rico is highly motivated to master the games they play.

10 Hearing about Rico's talents may make you want to race out and get a border collie of your own. However, unless you live on a farm with livestock to herd, McCaig advises, "DON'T. They are genetic **obsessive-compulsives**.* They must have work to do, and if not given work, they are very unhappy and often become nuisances. They are too much dog for most families."

11 Rico, though, may just be the perfect teacher's pet.

* *obsessive-compulsive* — characterized by a strong need to repeat certain actions or routines

1 What is the **main** purpose of paragraph 1?

- A. to pose questions about dog training
- B. to preview the basic methods of dog training
- C. to introduce the reader to a special border collie
- D. to provide the reader with background about border collies

2 What is the **main** purpose of paragraphs 3 and 4?

- A. to explain the causes of Rico's behavior
- B. to show the methods used to test Rico's abilities
- C. to describe how Rico's behavior changed over time
- D. to compare Rico's abilities with other dogs' abilities

3 In paragraph 6, why does the author compare Rico to a two-year-old child?

- A. to explain why Rico enjoys stories
- B. to explain how Rico learns language
- C. to explain how Rico must be kept busy
- D. to explain why Rico likes stuffed animals

4 What does paragraph 7 suggest about Rico?

- A. He remembers all the nonsense words he has learned.
- B. He understands harder words than the scientists realize.
- C. He may know many more words than he has been taught.
- D. He may have the ability to complete more complicated tasks.

- 5 In paragraph 10, what is the main argument the author makes?
- A. Border collies are usually obedient.
 - B. Border collies are intelligent animals.
 - C. Border collies may not make good pets.
 - D. Border collies do not work well with children.
- 6 What is the meaning of the word *retrieved* as it is used in paragraph 3?
- A. took out
 - B. lifted up
 - C. played with
 - D. brought back

- 7 Read the sentence from paragraph 6 in the box below.

An experimenter might put two objects in front of the child, perhaps a teddy bear and a potato masher, and ask, "May I have the bloof?"

What part of speech is the nonsense word *bloof* as it is used in the sentence?

- A. verb
- B. noun
- C. adverb
- D. adjective

Reading Comprehension

Session 1

Question 8 is an open-response question.

- Read the question carefully.
- Explain your answer.
- Add supporting details.
- Double-check your work.

Write your answer to question 8 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 8 Based on the article, explain why Rico might be considered a special dog. Support your answer with important and specific information from the article.