LAUNCH TEXT | INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY MODEL

This selection is an example of an informative/explanatory text, a type of writing in which an author presents facts and details in a way that allows readers to understand a topic or process. This is the type of writing you will develop in the Performance-Based Assessment at the end of the unit.

As you read, look at the way the ideas are introduced and explained. Mark the text to help you determine key ideas and details.

Reading Buddies

1. In a school library across town, a third-grade boy is reading his favorite book to a dog named Theo. The boy is petting the dog as he reads, and the dog has its paw on the boy’s foot. Both seem relaxed and happy, but what is a dog doing in a school library?

2. Theo, a five-year-old border collie, is one of more than 2,300 dogs around the country that have been trained to listen to people read aloud. He is part of a program that began in Utah in 1999. Through this program, teams of dogs and their handlers were sent out to schools and libraries to serve as reading companions for kids who were having trouble reading. Since then, similar reading programs have popped up in every region of the United States. They have helped thousands of kids improve not only their reading skills but also their attitudes about reading.

3. There are many reasons kids can have trouble reading. Some have learning disabilities. Some think it’s boring. Some are new to English. Others just haven’t found a book they like.

4. Whatever the cause, struggling readers have one thing in common: They lack confidence. Learning to read is often less about reading skills than it is about confidence. To a struggling reader, an animal listener can produce less anxiety than a human listener.
Dogs are the ideal reading companions. They aren’t in a hurry, so you can read at your own pace. They won’t stop you when you’ve pronounced something wrong. They won’t laugh at you or make you feel self-conscious. When you read to a dog, you are not as likely to feel judged. You get a chance to focus on the book you’re reading rather than your performance.

“I never finished a whole book before,” said a 10-year-old girl who participated in the program. She had been reading at a first-grade level and hardly ever practiced, because she was too shy to read aloud. But after a few weeks of reading to a dog companion, she finished the book. She was proud of herself for having overcome such a major hurdle!

Reading is like any other skill—the more you practice, the better you get. But it’s hard to find someone who has the time to sit down and listen. Readers can also feel nervous about making mistakes. “But if you’re practicing with a dog,” said one reading specialist, “you don’t mind making the mistake. In fact, you’ll probably correct it.”

More and more libraries and schools are using dogs to help kids improve their reading skills and confidence level. Sometimes, when people read to dogs, it’s the dogs that benefit. For example, the Arizona Animal Welfare League & Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is using reading as a tool to help shelter animals become happier, more well-adjusted pets. Program volunteers spend time reading to dogs and cats who are waiting to be adopted. Reading calms the animals down and makes them more comfortable around people.

Through the experience of reading, humans and animals are helping each other develop the skills they need to take on life’s challenges—whatever those challenges happen to be.