



My Dog Sees for Me

Guide dogs are trained to help people who have trouble seeing

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GO ONLINE

for a video about working dogs.



THEN

Elijah Logue, who is blind, used a white cane to get around.



NOW

Elijah works with his guide dog, Maple, for daily activities, such as hiking his favorite trails.

AS YOU READ, think about why guide dogs need special training to help people who are blind.

Elijah Logue has always loved to wrestle, run track, and hike in the mountains near his home. But for years, the Colorado Springs middle schooler used a special tool to get around—a white cane. Elijah, age 13, has been blind since birth (see *What Visual Impairments Can Look Like*, right). Like many others who are blind, he would sweep the long, thin cane back and forth to sense his surroundings. Even with the cane, Elijah would sometimes bump into people or objects. He had to walk slowly to move safely. Elijah wanted to become more independent.

In July 2024, Elijah started a partnership that changed everything. He teamed up with a guide dog named Maple! This pooch is so well-trained, he's replaced Elijah's cane—they even walk really fast together! "Having Maple help me navigate safely and having him as a friend has changed my life," says Elijah.

How did Maple learn how to be a guide dog? The pup went to school!

What's a Guide Dog?

Guide dogs are a type of **service animal**. They're specially trained to lead people with visual impairments as they do their daily activities. Guide dogs

What Visual Impairments Can Look Like

Diseases, conditions, and injuries can reduce vision in different ways. Here's how some visual impairments compare to normal vision.

Normal Vision



The person sees people and objects clearly in a full range of colors.

Blind Spots



Some conditions cause blurry or dark spots. These spots may move around.

Tunnel Vision



The outer part of a person's vision is affected. Sight may be reduced to a small pinhole.

Light Perception



Some people can only sense the difference between light and dark, and some movement.

This is how Elijah sees.

Choose two types of visual impairments. How are they similar? How are they different?

need to be loyal, alert, and smart problem solvers. A pet dog may learn to sit, stay, and fetch. But a guide dog learns how to keep their human safe. "The ultimate trick is being responsible for your human," says Jolene Hollister. She's a trainer for Guiding Eyes for the Blind in New York.

Certain dogs are better at this job than others. That's because different breeds, or types, tend to have different **traits**. Plus, each individual

dog is unique. Maple, Elijah's dog, is a **crossbreed**, or mix, of a Labrador retriever and a Bernese mountain dog. Labradors are usually smart, eager to please, and easy to train. Bernese mountain dogs are typically calm, good at solving problems, and protective. A mix of these traits makes a dog a promising candidate.

Guide dog organizations around the world typically breed their own dogs. Staff

SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (BACKGROUND, LETTERS); NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE (VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS); COURTESY OF LOGUE FAMILY (ALL OTHER IMAGES)

members seek out parent dogs that have the right traits. Nine weeks after puppies are born, they go to temporary homes. Volunteers raise the pups for 12 to 18 months (see *Training a Guide Dog*, below). The puppies are exposed to as many environments, sounds, people, and smells as possible. This helps **socialize** the dogs and build their confidence.

School's in Session

Once the pups are about a year-and-a-half old, the hard work begins. They return to the training center and learn how to help a blind person move through the world. Trainers teach the canines to follow commands, like *forward*, *left*, *right*, and *turn around*. Dogs learn to help blind handlers avoid obstacles



A puppy in training

and find things like chairs and doors, even in unfamiliar locations.

While on the job, guide dogs have to stay very focused! They can't get distracted by animals, food, or other people. The dogs learn that wearing their harness means it's time to work.

The toughest thing for guide dogs to learn might surprise you: It's when to disobey! Imagine a dog and handler are waiting to cross a street. The handler

commands the guide dog to go forward, but a car suddenly runs a red light!

"The dog has to feel confident to stop and not allow the person to keep walking," says Hollister. This skill is called "intelligent disobedience."



During World War I, many soldiers lost their sight in battle. In 1916, the first school to train guide dogs for war veterans opened in Germany.

A Perfect Pair

Not all dogs graduate. During training, dogs have to pass behavior and health checks. For example, if a dog is nervous or doesn't enjoy leading someone, they're not a good fit for the program. Those dogs will change jobs or be adopted as a pet.

At the end of training, dogs that graduate are paired with a blind person. Schools match dogs with handlers based on personality, walking pace, and where they live.



Guide dogs need to be comfortable in busy and loud places, like on trains.



Don't pet or talk to guide dogs on the job! They need to focus.

Look for These STEM Words!

service animal: an animal, usually a dog, that is trained to help people with disabilities or medical conditions

trait: a characteristic of a living thing

crossbreed: a breed, or type, of dog that combines the traits of two dog breeds

socialize: to train to be comfortable in a social environment

Now it's the handlers' turn to go to school! At the training center, handlers bond with their dogs and learn how to work with and care for them. To meet Maple, Elijah went to Mira, a guide dog school in Canada. He spent four weeks training with Maple.

Finally, the pairs go home to start their lives together. When the dogs aren't

working, they bond with their handlers. For fun, Elijah and Maple like to play games like tug-of-war. But Maple is happiest when he's on the job, says Elijah.

"Sometimes if we stop to talk to people, Maple will sit there and whimper because he wants to get back to work," he says. "He loves to work—all the guide dogs do—but I think him especially."

Training a Guide Dog

Here are a few common steps in a guide dog's training.



1 **Raising a Puppy**
While with foster families, pups learn basic commands such as sit, stay, and lie down. They experience many new environments and sounds.



2 **Going to School**
At a training center, the dogs learn the skills to guide people, such as climbing stairs. Dogs get a command, do the task, then get a treat. They repeat this pattern hundreds of times.



3 **Making a Match**
Trainers assign the dogs to blind people based on their needs. The dog and handler teams live and train together, practicing daily activities like avoiding obstacles while walking.



4 **Getting to Work**
After the intense training, the pairs head home. The guide dogs get to work being the eyes for their handlers.