

A Few Good Noses

The beagle who sniffs baggage and other cargo at the airport is no run-of-the-mill pooch. What does he do? He's a weapon in America's war against unwanted pests. The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Beagle Brigade is made up of highly trained dogs that work with human partners to keep illegal fruit, plants, and meat out of the country. Why is this important? The food can carry pests and diseases. The USDA snags about 2 million illegal products each year.

Beagles are the inspectors of choice because they are gentle, willing to work for treats, and, especially, because they have good noses. Dogs have about 220 million cells, called scent receptors, lining their noses. This gives them a strong sense of smell. Humans have only about 5 million of these cells. Dogs are also remarkably good at remembering smells, much like the way that computers store files. Some members of the Beagle Brigade can remember the smells of 50 different products.

The beagles that work for the USDA come from private owners and animal shelters. Once they are chosen, they go to boot camp to learn their job. There, they are taught some of the basic scents and rewarded for correct responses. They learn to sniff out a particular scent and alert their human partners by sitting down next to the source. After 8 to 12 weeks at camp, they're ready to go to work. Eventually, beagles can achieve a 90 percent success rate in sniffing out dangerous items.

Dogs are not the only animals doing important work with their noses. Rats, ferrets, and other mammals have been trained to find drugs and explosives. Pigs are experts at finding truffles in the ground.

But dogs are clearly the favorites in this business. And beagles are the champions of them all. One researcher compared beagles to Eagle Scouts, calling them "loyal, courageous, obedient, and patient." In other words, perfect for the job. And they love the work.

Use with page 288.

Resource Links RDI Book 1: p. 346

SAM Keywords: Detail

Read for Detail

Bits of information about a topic are called **details**. Details help you answer questions and find specific information. To find the important details in a text, ask: *who?* *what?* *where?* *when?* *why?* and *how?*

Use this chart to record details.

Passage: _____

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

Why?

How?

Use with pages 288 and 289.

