

Kids read to therapy dogs on Zoom in sessions that book up quickly

By Washington Post, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.26.20

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Level **400L**



Image 1. Pax (right), 9 years old, reads a book to therapy dog Winnie over a video call. Winnie (left) often sleeps through the online sessions, but Winnie's owner, Margie Tommer (center), said that is part of Winnie's charm. Photo: James Haworth/People Animals Love

Nicholas Gaiani is 6 years old. He was recently on a video call. He was reading the words to a song. He smiled as he read. His listener was a dog named JP.

Nicholas reads to a dog each week. He reads over video call. It is through a program. The program is called "Read to a PAL Therapy Dog." It is organized by a group. The group is called People. Animals. Love., or PAL.

PAL normally sets up reading sessions in libraries. Kids read aloud to dogs. They also get to pet the dogs. That is not possible right now. This is because of COVID-19.

PAL moved the reading program to online video sessions. Every month, it helps hundreds of kids practice their reading.

JP the dog slept through much of the session. Fiona Lassiter is JP's owner. She says JP sleeps because the reading is soothing to him.

Dogs Are Easy To Read To

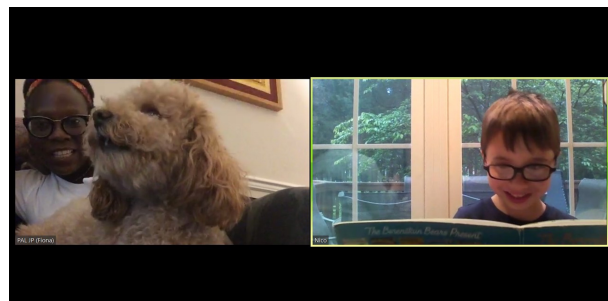
There is no judgment at these sessions. Dog naps are OK. It is also OK if the readers struggle with some words.

Nicholas' mother is Alissa Gaiani.

"He's really proud that he can read," said Ms. Gaiani. The reading sessions let him show off a bit.

It can be scary to read in front of the class. It is less scary to read to a dog. Dogs do not judge.

Nicholas has done many reading sessions. He enjoys meeting different types of dogs. They also make staying home a little easier. Many kids everywhere have to stay at home right now. This is because of COVID-19.



"He misses his friends," Ms. Gaiani said. "This is something for him to look forward to — something different."

Kids Look Forward To The Sessions

PAL has sessions three days a week. The sessions are 30 minutes. During each session, a child is paired with a dog. The owner is there, too. Kids read to one dog for a bit. Then, they switch to another dog.

Kids pick a favorite book to read. As they read, they turn the books around. They show the pictures to the dogs. At the end, the dogs wave goodbye. The owners wiggle their dogs' paws.

Nathan Guevin Burch is 9 years old. He has been doing reading sessions. During a recent one, he read to Skylos. Skylos is a black Labrador.

Heidi Guevin is Nathan's mom. She thought Nathan might get bored with the sessions. That has not happened. She said he loves doing it.

Pax Lukanic is another kid reader. His mom is Jennifer Logun. At first, Pax was not excited to read. That changed when he started these sessions. Now, he is excited to read to the dogs. Pax recently read to a dog named Winnie.

Quiz

- 1 What is the article MAINLY about?
- (A) kids reading to therapy dogs
 - (B) dogs that nap on video calls
 - (C) why it is good for kids to pet dogs
 - (D) how dogs wave to kids in videos
- 2 Read the paragraph from the section "Kids Look Forward To The Sessions."

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- What is the focus of this paragraph?
- (A) why owners need to be with their dogs
 - (B) why kids need to switch to other dogs
 - (C) what happens during the reading sessions
 - (D) what stories kids like to share with the dogs
- 3 How is reading to a dog different from reading in front of the class?
- (A) It is less fun.
 - (B) It is less scary.
 - (C) It takes more time.
 - (D) It uses more books.
- 4 How did Pax Lukanic change because of the PAL reading sessions?
- (A) He got excited to read.
 - (B) He learned to love dogs.
 - (C) He started to miss school.
 - (D) He asked his mom for a dog.