



Chaser: Unlocking the Genius of the Dog Who Knows a Thousand Words

John W. Pilley

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A New York Times Bestseller

The amazing story of a very smart Border collie who is redefining animal intelligence.

Chaser has a way with words. She knows over a thousand of them—more than any other animal of any species except humans. In addition to common nouns like house, ball, and tree, she has memorized the names of more than one thousand toys and can retrieve any of them on command. Based on that learning, she and her owner and trainer, retired psychologist John Pilley, have moved on to further impressive feats, demonstrating her ability to understand sentences with multiple elements of grammar and to learn new behaviors by imitation.

John's ingenuity and tenacity as a researcher are as impressive as Chaser's accomplishments. His groundbreaking approach has opened the door to a new understanding of animal intelligence, one that requires us to reconsider what actually goes on in a dog's mind. Chaser's achievements reveal her use of deductive reasoning and complex problem-solving skills to address novel challenges.

Yet astonishingly, Chaser isn't unique. John's training methods can be adopted by any dog lover. Through the poignant story of how he trained Chaser, raised her as a member of the Pilley family, and proved her abilities to the scientific community, he reveals the positive impact of incorporating learning into play and more effectively channeling a dog's natural drives.

John's work with Chaser offers a fresh perspective on what's possible in the relationship between a dog and a human. His story points us toward a new way of relating to our canine companions that takes into account our evolving understanding of the way animals and humans learn.

Chaser: Unlocking the Genius of the Dog Who Knows a Thousand Words Details

Date : Published October 29th 2013 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9780544102576

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Format : Hardcover 260 pages

Genre : Animals, Dogs, Nonfiction, Psychology

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From Reader Review Chaser: Unlocking the Genius of the Dog Who Knows a Thousand Words for online ebook

Leanna Aker says

I enjoyed this story about Chaser and his retired-from-academia owner. The story discusses how Chaser came to know over 1000 words, learn how to identify objects by exclusion, and start to put together 3 part commands (take one object to another object). It helps the story that Chaser is very endearing. :-)

One minor gripe.... at times the book seems to take the flavor of a dog training book. (i.e., do it this way). However, I think that if the "typical" dog owner was looking to train a "typical" dog, there might be pieces missing.

All in all, a very enjoyable read with included stories about Chaser's public appearances.

Gabrielle de Waal says

Chaser is a Very Good Dog.

Stephanie says

I really don't think there was enough here to fill an entire book, so there was a lot of filler that I found myself skipping over. Still, I enjoyed it, and am trying some of the things I learned here with my own dog. I loved the photo on the back flap; it made me smile every time I looked at it.

Nick says

Chaser is a border collie who knows the names of over one thousand of her toys. She can fetch them, paw at them or nose them on command- by others too not just her dad/trainer. This is the story of how Dr. Pilley, a retired psychology professor trained and tested Chaser. It also covers how they got published and the shows they were on.

It is very interesting if a little long winded. Chaser knows a bunch of balls by ball, an individual name and toy. How Dr. Pilley taught this to Chaser was gone over in detail. Again very interesting. And then all over again for the frisbees. That happened more than once.

What I like the most is above all else Chaser is a pet. She doesn't live in a lab and Dr. Pilley refers to her as his research partner. Just as I think it should be!!

One final thought...all of Chaser's toys are labeled. Anyone else think she's just reading the names?!

Kari says

John Pilley uses old-school psychology to train his border collie in *Chaser: Unlocking the Genius of the Dog Who Knows a Thousand Words*, co-authored with Hilary Hinzmann. What a coincidence that the methods he uses, based on his experience as a professor of human psychology, look a lot like force-free dog training!

With one exception: Like Ted Kerasote in *Merle's Door*, Pilley turns to an aversive method to curb Chaser's "chase drive." While Kerasote used a shock collar, Pilley uses a mighty jerk of a long line and a stern "No." It's hard for me to say these techniques are wrong, wrong, wrong, because as far as reported, they prevented the dogs from chasing things, and neither Merle nor Chaser developed aggressive or fearful tendencies as a result. I can say that knowing what I now know, I would never use either method on a dog.

Otherwise, the book is a joy to read. I love that this retired professor refers to himself as Chaser's "Pop Pop" (because that's what his grandson calls him). Throughout, Pilley emphasizes how much fun it is for Chaser to learn new words. He turns down an offer to let another scientist work with her, which would have meant more academic acclaim, because that would mean having Chaser live with someone else temporarily. Above all, Chaser is a family dog.

When Chaser appears on the Today Show, Pilley feels bad that Chaser doesn't have a chance to play with her toys after fetching them by name for Matt Lauer. Chaser is supposed to get to play with her toys as her reward for fetching the right toy.

I've heard dog trainers brag about how many words their dogs know. How do they really know? I wondered. Beyond their names and basic obedience commands, most dogs know "outside" or "walk" or "dinner," but how do you keep track of the number of words? Pilley set about it scientifically, by giving each toy a unique name. He has a list of 1,022 different toy names that Chaser understands. He also teaches her categories of words: she knows a racquetball by its name "Blue," and also knows that it is a "toy" and a "ball."

Pilley works with Chaser for hours a day. With that much dedication, I bet any dog of above average intelligence could learn quite a few words.

Mary (BookHounds) says

MY THOUGHTS

LOVED IT

Bottom Line: Dogs are much smarter than they are given credit. John Pilley explains exactly how quickly they learn and given the chance can communicate with us. Pilley explains how he used his dogs as research subjects in his lab in his job as a psychology professor. His students observed them and dissected their abilities. After his last dog dies, his wife insists he is getting a new puppy for Christmas and they both agree that a local breeder of Border Collies is their best choice. With infinite patience and his training as a scientist, he teaches his new pup to relate objects to words.

Border Collies are working dogs and love routines, without structure in their lives, they can be almost destructive. Their natural curiosity and ability to be trained is both a gift and a curse. I had an Australian Shepherd with a similar personality and if we didn't do our routine each day, he was a very unhappy dog. I

had taught my dog probably 100 words and he could easily follow commands to retrieve certain objects. I never imagined that a dog could place names to over a thousand objects.

There is a science background to this book, so as well as being a memoir, it also has some wonderful information based on fact to go along with it. Chaser was featured on a NOVA program about her unique abilities. This is one fascinating look at how you can train a dog to learn more than you thought possible with a little extra time and energy. Dog and memoir fans are going to adore this story.

Heather says

This was an enjoyable and educational read. Dr. Pilley, a retired psychology professor who loves dogs, takes the time to not only educate his border collie, but document her learning so that there is some scientific contribution made in terms of what animals can understand about language and how they learn. The book is far more in depth than any videos you can see about Chaser, yet accessible to the average reader vs. scientist in terms of methodology. It is clear that Chaser is a loved family member and that her aptitude is capitalized on. Not every dog or every border collie will be able to achieve these results. However, what was interesting is the way he trained her and one can get some good ideas about communication training to use with your own dog if you'd like to try. His techniques are positive and tailored to the dog. Chaser is more toy motivated than treat motivated - dogs like that can be harder to train but Pilley has really done a wonderful job with Chaser, making the most of that strong toy drive.

One thing I enjoyed about the book was that, although in no way portrayed as a negative, it should be obvious to the average reader that a border collie is not a good dog for most people. They have such drive and energy, what it takes to keep them happy is way more than most people can provide. Chaser is very lucky - she has an owner who worked with her natural play and herding drives to make learning fun for her, and also documented it to make it useful for scientific research. He clearly recognizes that when she is asked to perform and not rewarded with play it's not fair. It should also be clear that even a dog like Chaser, who is trained hours per day, can be a handful - she has a will of her own. She is not always obedient. She can be very demanding. She will not let you watch TV and ignore her. This is the truth about most herding breeds - they really are very demanding and in the wrong homes they become neurotic or destructive. I hope that Chaser's popularity doesn't motivate people to get border collies for the wrong reasons - hopefully anyone who reads the book will realize that, as with all smart animals, they are a HUGE commitment!

If you like really smart dogs, are interested in dog training, or you have an interest in language skills and animal vs. human language learning, you are sure to enjoy this. I think even most dog lovers would enjoy it, though there is a lot of emphasis on training techniques. I found it enjoyable throughout.

Jane Steff says

Loved it. I want a border collie now.

Nancy says

The information provided on Chaser and his ability to learn was very interesting to me personally. However, I found the positive influence this project had on the author, John Pilley, equally fascinating. Pilley did his extensive work with Chaser in his late 70s, and it is still continuing into his mid-80s. The research, as well as his incredibly strong relationship with his dog, have kept him physically, mentally, and spiritually energized. As a senior citizen who works with active large dogs, I find that very encouraging.

This is a book worth reading for anyone interested in animal intelligence or simply in learning more about dogs as our companions--or both. I enjoyed it and admire Professor Pilley for his impressive dedication to his new career, furthering our understanding of canine language acquisition. In my opinion, he models the perfect "retirement." It sure beats sitting on a beach or lounging on the front porch. He is quite an inspiration.

Simona says

The story does have a scientific background in language learning, but it's primarily a memory, author's personal experience of the communication with the dog, through training. It's difficult to avoid the comparison between own dog with Chaser - which is extremely susceptible to learning, but I'm convinced that we all see our own pets as the smartest (and the most beautiful) animal in the world, and that we all can share our own breathtaking experience of our pets in communicating with us. The story is full of joy and love, and perfectly illustrates the relationship between man and dog, how great (sometimes moody and too demanding) companions are dogs.

Noella Allisen says

Now that's one smart dog and an incredibly dedicated, patient, loving owner. All of this came out loud and clear in this book. I can't say I was riveted to the story but it was interesting to read about the training.

Jami says

This was interesting on several levels. First and foremost, of course, is Chaser! I was amazed at how Chaser learned and his deductive abilities. I also loved the bond between Chaser and the author. In addition to Chaser, this book was part memoir and part a discussion about the author's teaching methods and research. Overall, I enjoyed this.

Theresa says

Perfect book for an English teacher and a dog lover such as myself. Might be a bit of a slog for someone not quite as interested in how language is learned (by humans or by dogs). What a smart dog you are, Chaser!

Sophia Velázquez says

Amazing application of language psychology

Gregg says**Fascinating story and research**

This book confirms what many dog owners have thought all along: they dogs are smarter than most people think. The author's painstaking experimentation gives us clues on how to continue to learn about their cognition and what it means for human child development.

Marianne says

Interesting book, VERY interesting dog. Lucky dog to have come into the life of the perfect human being for her. He is a mostly retired psychology professor who loves dogs and has a lot of time on his hands, literally 4-5+ hours a day to work with the dog, plus students to help him. It's the perfect storm of people, animal, and passion for each other's well-being.

Some aspects of the book were a bit tedious. He'd start out talking about something mundane and I'd be thinking, something is going to happen here, and well, nothing does. But on the whole, if you're a dog lover and into all the new research going on in the field of canine ethology, or you just really love cool dogs, this is a good read.

Kathy England says

Anyone interested in dogs and/or animal behavior should read this book. The author gets bogged down with too much detail about the everyday, notably Chaser's appearances on TV, but the information on how he taught Chaser and what Chaser is capable of is extremely interesting.

Sally Pearce says

I was so excited to start this book, thinking it was a good book about dogs. a 40%, I decided that I really wasn't interested in a whole book on training a Border collie. I don't have one and never will. I know how smart they are.

The research and training was good and interesting, but I have so many books that I really want to read that I'm moving on.

Kirsti says

An amazing book about an amazing animal. What this book is really good at doing is comparing your own, untrained animals to the wit of Chaser. I mean sure, Danny understands 'Get a Ball', but I've never discriminated against any of his toys. They are all 'Ball' and a stick does just as well. That this dog knows each of its toys by name, and knows the difference between nosing or taking the toy amazes me. I knew Border Collies were intelligent (two of my boys are half Border Collie) but this dog is beyond amazing. The book passes quickly in a rush of everything learned and experienced. I highly recommend it for any animal lover or dog enthusiast!

Steve Nolan says

I've read a lot of books about famous animals recently, and this is by far the best one. (It's so deep in my wheelhouse I think it can't ever get back out.)

You get a real sense of what the person, animal and science are all doing, which is a lot more than most of these books do. (Usually it's just a recollection about what the animal's owner's life was like. Which, I don't care, you're not the point of this. Tell me more about the cute puppy.)

It'd prolly have been a 5 star review, if not for the hokey dialogue. I dunno why, but everyone always turns into the biggest cornball in the world when quoted in books like these.
