

COMPREHENSION **CIRCUIT** TRAINING



PACT Principal Investigator: Deborah Simmons, Ph.D.
PACT Project Coordinator: Melissa Fogarty, Ph.D. **PACT Project Assistant:** Kimberly Williams
Graphic Design: Heather Moutray, Kimberly Williams, Melissa Fogarty, PhD.

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COMPREHENSION CIRCUIT TRAINING

STUDENT TEXT LEVEL 1



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Literary Text: Short Fiction

Thank You, Ma'am

By Langston Hughes

1 She was a large woman with a large purse that had everything in it but hammer and nails. It had a long strap, and she carried it slung across her shoulder. It was about eleven o'clock at night, and she was walking alone, when a boy ran up behind her and tried to snatch her purse. The strap broke with the single tug the boy gave it from behind. But the boy's weight and the weight of the purse combined caused him to lose his balance so, in stead of taking off full blast as he had hoped, the boy fell on his back on the sidewalk, and his legs flew up. The large woman simply turned around and kicked him right square in his blue-jeaned siter. Then she reached down, picked the boy up by his shirt front, and shook him until his teeth rattled.

2 After that the woman said, "Pick up my pocket book, boy, and give it here." She still held him. But she bent down enough to permit him to stoop and pick up her purse. Then she said, "Now ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

3 Firmly gripped by his shirt front, the boy said, "Yes'm."

4 The woman said, "What did you want to do it for?"

5 The boy said, "I didn't aim to."

6 She said, "You a lie!"

7 By that time two or three people passed, stopped, turned to look, and some stood watching.

8 “If I turn you loose, will you run?” asked the woman.

9 “Yes’m,” said the boy.

10 “Then I won’t turn you loose,” said the woman. She did not release him.

11 “I’m very sorry, lady, I’m sorry,” whispered the boy.

12 “Um-hum! And your face is dirty. I got a great mind to wash your face for you. Ain’t you got nobody home to tell you to wash your face?”

13 “No’m,” said the boy.

14 “Then it will get washed this evening,” said the large woman starting up the street, dragging the frightened boy behind her.

15 He looked as if he were fourteen or fifteen, frail and willow-wild, in tennis shoes and blue jeans.

16 The woman said, “You ought to be my son. I would teach you right from wrong. Least I can do right now is to wash your face. Are you hungry?”

17 “No’m,” said the being dragged boy. “I just want you to turn me loose.”

18 “Was I bothering you when I turned that corner?” asked the woman.

19 “No’m.”

20 “But you put yourself in contact with me,” said the woman. “If you think that that contact is not going to last awhile, you got another thought coming. When I get through with you, sir, you are going to remember Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones.”

21 Sweat popped out on the boy’s face and he began to struggle. Mrs. Jones stopped, jerked him around in front of her, put a half-nelson about his neck, and continued to drag him up the street. When she got to her door, she dragged the boy inside, down a hall, and into a large kitchenette furnished room at the rear of the house. She switched on the light and left the door open. The boy could hear other roomers laughing and talking in the large house. Some of their doors were open, too, so he knew he and the woman were not alone. The woman still had him by the neck in the middle of her room.

22 She said, “What is your name?”

23 “Roger,” answered the boy.

24 “Then, Roger, you go to that sink and wash your face,” said the woman, whereupon she turned him loose—at last. Roger looked at the door—looked at the woman—looked at the door—and went to the sink.

25 “Let the water run until it gets warm,” she said. “Here’s a clean towel.”

26 “You gonna take me to jail?” asked the boy, bending over the sink.

27 “Not with that face, I would not take you nowhere,” said the woman.

“Here I am trying to get home to cook me a bite to eat and you snatch my pocketbook! Maybe you ain’t been to your supper either, late as it be. Have you?”

28 “There’s nobody home at my house,” said the boy.

29 “Then we’ll eat,” said the woman, “I believe you’re hungry—or been hungry—to try to snatch my pocketbook.”

30 “I wanted a pair of blue suede shoes,” said the boy.

31 “Well, you didn’t have to snatch my pocketbook to get some suede shoes,” said Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones. “You could of asked me.”



32 “M’am?”

33 The water dripping from his face, the boy looked at her. There was a long pause. A very long pause. After he had dried his face and not knowing what else to do dried it again, the boy turned around, wondering what next. The door was open. He could make a dash for it down the hall. He could run, run, run, run, run!

34 The woman was sitting on the day bed. After a while she said, “I were young once and I wanted things I could not get.”

35 There was another long pause. The boy’s mouth opened.

Then he frowned, but not knowing he frowned.

36 The woman said, “Um-hum! You thought I was going to say but, didn’t you? You thought I was going to say, but I didn’t snatch people’s pocketbooks. Well, I wasn’t going to say that.” Pause. Silence. “I have done things, too, which I would not tell you, son—neither tell God, if he didn’t already know. So you set down while I fix us something to eat. You might run that comb through your hair so you will look presentable.”

37 In another corner of the room behind a screen was a gas plate and an icebox. Mrs. Jones got up and went behind the screen. The woman did not watch the boy to see if he was going to run now, nor did she watch her purse which she left behind her on the day bed. But the boy took care to sit on the far side of the room where he thought she could easily see him out of the corner other eye, if she wanted to. He did not trust the woman not to trust him. And he did not want to be mistrusted now.

38 “Do you need somebody to go to the store,” asked the boy, “maybe to get some milk or something?”

39 “Don’t believe I do,” said the woman, “unless you just want sweet milk yourself. I was going to make cocoa out of this canned milk I got here.”

40 “That will be fine,” said the boy.

41 She heated some lima beans and ham she had in the icebox, made the cocoa, and set the table. The woman did not ask the boy anything about where he lived, or his

folks, or anything else that would embarrass him. Instead, as they ate, she told him about her job in a hotel beauty shop that stayed open late, what the work was like, and how all kinds of women came in and out, blondes, red-heads, and Spanish. Then she cut him a half of her ten-cent cake.

42 “Eat some more, son,” she said.

43 When they were finished eating she got up and said, “Now, here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes. And next time, do not make the mistake of latching onto my pocketbook nor nobody else’s—because shoes got by devilish ways will burn your feet. I got to get my rest now. But I wish you would behave yourself, son, from here on in.”

44 She led him down the hall to the front door and opened it. “Goodnight! Behave yourself, boy!” she said, looking out into the street.

45 The boy wanted to say something else other than, “Thank you, ma’am” to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, but although his lips moved, he couldn’t even say that as he turned at the foot of the barren stoop and looked back at the large woman in the door. Then she shut the door.

After Twenty Years

by O. Henry

1 The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively. The impressiveness was habitual and not for show, for spectators were few. The time was barely 10 o'clock at night, but chilly gusts of wind with a taste of rain in them had well nigh depeopled the streets.

2 Trying doors as he went, twirling his club with many intricate and artful movements, turning now and then to cast his watchful eye adown the pacific thoroughfare, the officer, with his stalwart form and slight swagger, made a fine picture of a guardian of the peace. The vicinity was one that kept



early hours. Now and then you might see the lights of a cigar store or of an all-night lunch counter; but the majority of the doors belonged to business places that had long since been closed.

3 When about midway of a certain block the policeman suddenly slowed his walk. In the doorway of a darkened hardware store a man leaned, with an unlighted cigar in his mouth. As the policeman walked up to him the man spoke up quickly.

4 "It's all right, officer," he said, reassuringly. "I'm just waiting for a friend. It's an appointment made twenty years ago. Sounds a little funny to you, doesn't it? Well, I'll explain if

you'd like to make certain it's all straight. About that long ago there used to be a restaurant where this store stands- "Big Joe" Brady's restaurant."

5 "Until five years ago," said the policeman. "It was torn down then."

6 The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-jawed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarf in was a large diamond, oddly set.

7 "Twenty years ago tonight," said the man, "I dined here at "Big Joe" Brady's with Jimmy Wells, my best chum, and the finest chap in the world. He and I were raised here in New York, just like two brothers, together. I was eighteen and Jimmy was twenty. The next morning I was to start for the West to make my fortune. You couldn't have dragged Jimmy out of New York; he thought it was the only place on earth. Well, we agreed that night that we would meet here again exactly twenty years from that date and time, no matter what our conditions might be or from what distance we might have to come. We figured that in twenty years each of us ought to have our destiny worked out and our fortunes made, whatever they were going to be."

8 "It sounds pretty interesting," said the policeman. "Rather a long time between meets, though, it seems to me. Haven't you heard from your friend since you left?"

9 "Well, yes, for a time we corresponded," said the other. "But after a year or two we lost track of each other. You see, the West is a pretty big proposition, and I kept hustling around over it pretty lively. But I know Jimmy will meet me here if he's alive, for he always was the truest, stanchest old

chap in the world. He'll never forget. I came a thousand miles to stand in this door tonight, and it's worth it if my old partner turns up."

10 The waiting man pulled out a handsome watch, the lids of it set with small diamonds.

11 "Three minutes to ten," he announced. "It was exactly ten o'clock when we parted here at the restaurant door."

12 "Did pretty well out West, didn't you?" asked the policeman.

13 "You bet! I hope Jimmy has done half as well. He was a kind of plodder, though, good fellow as he was. I've had to compete with some of the sharpest wits going to get my pile. A man gets in a groove in New York. It takes the West to put a razor-edge on him."

14 The policeman twirled his club and took a step or two.

15 "I'll be on my way. Hope your friend comes around all right. Going to call time on him sharp?"

16 "I should say not!" said the other. "I'll give him half an hour at least. If Jimmy is alive on earth he'll be here by that time. So long, officer."

17 "Good-night, sir," said the policeman, passing on along his beat, trying doors as he went.

18 There was now a fine, cold drizzle falling, and the wind had risen from its uncertain puffs into a steady blow. The few foot passengers astir in that quarter hurried dismally and silently along with coat collars turned high and

pocketed hands. And in the door of the hardware store the man who had come a thousand miles to fill an appointment, uncertain almost to absurdity, with the friend of his youth, smoked his cigar and waited.

19 About twenty minutes he waited, and then a tall man in a long overcoat, with collar turned up to his ears, hurried across from the opposite side of the street. He went directly to the waiting man.

20 “Is that you, Bob?” he asked, doubtfully.

21 “Is that you, Jimmy Wells?” cried the man in the door.

22 “Bless my heart!” exclaimed the new arrival, grasping both the other’s hands with his own. “It’s Bob, sure as fate. I was certain I’d find you here if you were still in existence. Well, well, well! -twenty years is a long time. The old gone, Bob; I wish it had lasted, so we could have had another dinner there. How has the West treated you, old man?”

23 “Bully, it has given me everything I asked it for. You’ve changed lots, Jimmy. I never thought you were so tall by two or three inches.”

24 “Oh, I grew a bit after I was twenty.”

25 “Doing well in New York, Jimmy?”

26 “Moderately. I have a position in one of the city departments. Come on, Bob; we’ll go around to a place I know of, and have a good long talk about old times.”

27 The two men started up the street, arm in arm. The man from the West, his egotism enlarged by success, was beginning to outline the history of his career. The other, submerged in his overcoat, listened with interest.

28 At the corner stood a drug store, brilliant with electric lights. When they came into this glare each of them turned simultaneously to gaze upon the other's face.

29 The man from the West stopped suddenly and released his arm.

30 "You're not Jimmy Wells," he snapped. "Twenty years is a long time, but not long enough to change a man's nose from a Roman to a pug."

31 "It sometimes changes a good man into a bad one, said the tall man. "You've been under arrest for ten minutes, 'Silky' Bob. Chicago thinks you may have dropped over our way and wires us she wants to have a chat with you. Going quietly, are you? That's sensible. Now, before we go on to the station here's a note I was asked to hand you. You may read it here at the window. It's from Patrolman Wells."

32 The man from the West unfolded the little piece of paper handed him. His hand was steady when he began to read, but it trembled a little by the time he had finished. The note was rather short.

33 "Bob: I was at the appointed place on time. When you struck the match to light your cigar I saw it was the face of the man wanted in Chicago. Somehow I couldn't do it myself, so I went around and got a plain clothes man to do the job. JIMMY."



Informational Text: Expository

Black Wings: The American Black in Aviation

1 The term, black aviation, describes a historical fact: For the first half century of powered flight, blacks flew in segregated circumstances. The story of black aviation is one of breakthroughs against restrictions. First, such isolated pioneers as Bessie Coleman overcame the entrenched discrimination of the time. Coleman's brief career as a stunt pilot inspired a generation of black youth. Even so, at the time of Lindbergh's historic flight to Paris in 1927, only a few blacks had become aviators. Racial prejudice excluded most.

2 In the 1930s African Americans formed flying clubs to promote aviation in the black community. The clubs made it possible for African Americans to participate in aviation: Their members trained pilots and mechanics and promoted aviation through publications, lectures, and even air "circuses." These air shows drew the curious with promises of "aerial acrobatics, rolls, turns, spins, ribbon cutting, crazy flying." During 1933-34 the long-distance flights of C. Alfred Anderson and Dr. Albert E. Forsythe displayed both flyers' skills while appealing for equality in aviation. In Los Angeles William J. Powell set up the Bessie Coleman Aero Club and wrote his visionary book *Black Wings*, which urged black youth to choose careers in aviation. In Chicago Cornelius R. Coffey established the Coffey School of Aeronautics, served as the first president of the National Airmen's Association, and built an airstrip in an African American community. Both Powell and Coffey recognized that blacks would need technical skills to advance in aviation.

3 In 1939 the Chicago flyers, with the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), spurred the federal government to offer aviation training programs for blacks. Congress had established the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) program to train pilots for a wartime emergency, and now for the first time African Americans received flight training at federally funded CPT schools. Despite the modest budget allocated for the segregated black training program, the number of licensed black pilots grew dramatically.

4 When the U.S. Army Air Corps activated the 99th Fighter Squadron in 1942, blacks achieved their first foothold in military aviation. Civil rights leaders long had called for integrating African Americans into the Air Corps, but the War Department continued to resist. When black cadets trained at the newly established Tuskegee Army Airfield, they flew as part of a separate black air force. Between 1941 and 1945, the Tuskegee airmen proved that blacks could be trained and mobilized for the sophisticated task of combat flying. In World War II, the 99th Fighter Squadron and three other all-black fighter units composed the 332d Fighter Group. These units demonstrated that the decision to train African American flyers had been a good one. The 332d's commander, Col. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., stressed professionalism and combat efficiency. His leadership helped eliminate hostility toward blacks' participation. Black airmen, returning from the war with a sense of accomplishment, were impatient with the segregation they had experienced both overseas and at home.

5 The Tuskegee Airmen forever shattered the myth that blacks lacked the technical skills for combat flying. The war years had exposed the cost and inefficiency of maintaining separate black air units. In 1948 President Harry S. Truman's Executive Order 9981 called for equal opportunity in the armed forces. In 1949 the Air Force became the

first armed service to integrate. Very slowly, civilian aviation followed suit. In the 1960s African Americans were hired and promoted to positions of responsibility in commercial aviation. In 1965 Marlon D. Greene won a long court battle with Continental Airlines over his right to a job as a commercial pilot. As a result of this important case, blacks began to break down racial barriers in the airline industry. In the late 1960s blacks entered the ranks of the space program.

6 The most recent generation of black aviators has garnered many firsts: Daniel “Chappie” James, Jr., the first black four-star general; Dr. Guion Bluford, Jr., first African American to go into space; Mae Jemison, the first black woman astronaut; and Patrice Clarke-Washington, the first black female captain to fly for a major airline.



7 Nonetheless, progress has been slow, and blacks are still underrepresented in the aviation industry. But with legal obstacles removed, and their participation increasing, today’s flyers could make a reality of William Powell’s vision—“to fill the air with black wings.”

Bessie Coleman

8 “If I can create the minimum of my plans and desires there shall be no regrets.”—Bessie Coleman

9 Bessie Coleman’s sister, Elois Patterson, wrote “Brave Bessie,” an article about her adventurous sister. It has been excerpted here.

10 Bessie Coleman was called “Brave Bessie” because she had fearlessly taken to the air when aviation was a greater risk than it is today and when few men had been able to muster such courage. An avid reader, Bessie was well informed on what the Negro was doing and what he had done. Given the opportunity, she knew he could become as efficient in aviation as anyone. She toyed with the idea of learning to fly, even displayed an airplane made by a Negro boy in the window of the barber shop in which she was a manicurist. She was refused by each aviation school to which she applied, sometimes because of her race and sometimes because she was both a Negro and a woman. She took her quest to Robert S. Abbott, a founder, editor, and publisher of the Chicago Weekly Defender. He advised her to study French and Bessie promptly enrolled in a language school in Chicago’s Loop. That accomplished, he assisted her in contacting an accredited aviation school in France. She planned to obtain certification and return to the United States to open an aviation training school for young blacks.

11 “Bessie made two trips to Europe, returning to Chicago from the second one in 1922...holder of a certificate from the FAI [Federation Aeronautique Internationale, the flying school that issued Bessie’s license].... She put on an air exhibition in 1922 at Checkerboard Field, today known as Midway Airport, Chicago, after which she received many calls from young Negro men, anxious to learn to fly. Bessie had obtained her certificate at great personal expense and sacrifice. She told prospective students that they had to wait until either some forward-thinking blacks opened

a training school or until Bessie herself could give enough demonstrations and accrue sufficient money to undertake opening a school herself.

12 “Bessie barnstormed across the country and undertook a rigorous program of speaking engagements. When Bessie appeared over the town in which she was reared, Waxahachie, Texas, she was permitted to use the university grounds of the whites for her exhibition flying. She refused to exhibit unless her people were allowed into the grounds through the front entrance, although they were separated once inside the grounds.... She decided to make an all-out effort to establish a school where she could train young Negro men to fly.

13 “I remember one letter she wrote me saying she had taken an escort, and even went to a pool room, so determined was she to have Negro men become air-minded. The very last letter that I received from her said, ‘I am right on the threshold of opening a school.’”

William J. Powell

14 “There is a better job and a better future in aviation for Negroes than in any other industry, and the reason is this: aviation is just beginning its period of growth, and if we get into it now, while it is still uncrowded, we can grow as aviation grows.” —William J. Powell, *Black Wings*

15 Born in 1897, William J. Powell earned an engineering degree from the University of Illinois. In 1917 he enlisted in officer training school and served in a segregated unit during World War I. During the war Powell was gassed by the enemy, and he suffered health problems throughout

his life from this poison gas attack.

16 After the war Powell opened service stations in Chicago. He became interested in aviation, but the only school that would train him was located in Los Angeles. Thus, he sold his businesses in Chicago and moved to the West Coast. After learning to fly, Powell dreamed of opening an all-black flight school.

17 By the 1930s Los Angeles had become an important center for black aviation. Powell organized the Bessie Coleman Aero Club to promote aviation awareness in the black community. On Labor Day 1931 the flying club sponsored the first all-black air show held in the United States, an event that attracted an estimated 15,000 spectators. Through the efforts of the Bessie Coleman School, the number of black aviators increased dramatically despite the economic hardships of the Great Depression.

18 William Powell used many methods to attract African Americans to the field of aviation. He made a film about a young man who wanted to be a flyer, and for two years he published the *Craftsmen Aero-News*, a monthly journal about black aviation. He offered scholarships with free technical training in aeronautics for black youth. He invited celebrities, such as jazz musician Duke Ellington and boxer Joe Louis, to lend their names—and their funds—to his cause.

19 Powell published *Black Wings* in 1934. Dedicated to Bessie Coleman, the book entreated black men and women “to fill the air with black wings.” A visionary supporter of aviation, Powell urged black youth to carve out their own destiny—to become pilots, aircraft designers, and business

leaders in the field of aviation.

Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.

20 “The privileges of being an American belong to those brave enough to fight for them.

—Benjamin O. Davis, Jr.

21 In 1936 Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., became the first black student to graduate from West Point in the 20th century. He graduated 35th in a class of 276 students. While at West Point, he was officially “silenced” by his classmates: No one spoke to him for four years except in the line of duty. Davis remembers, “When we traveled to football games on buses or trains, I had a seat to myself.... I lived alone in whatever quarters were provided.... Except for tutoring some underclassmen... I had no conversations with other cadets.”

22 Cadets use silencing to punish a classmate who is guilty of wrongdoing. Benjamin Davis was guilty of nothing but being black. “It was designed to make me buckle, but I refused to buckle. They didn’t understand that I was going to stay there, and I was going to graduate. I was not missing anything by not associating with them. They were missing a great deal by not knowing me.”

23 When Davis graduated he applied for pilot training but was turned down because there were no black units in the Army Air Corps to which he could be assigned. While he was serving in the infantry in 1940, this policy was reconsidered, and Davis was sent to Tuskegee for pilot training. Because of the war and his ability, he was quickly promoted to lieutenant colonel and commanded the 99th Fighter Squadron in combat. After one year with this

all-black unit in Italy, Davis was promoted to colonel and asked to lead the 322d Fighter Group. Under Davis's superb leadership, the Tuskegee Airmen earned the highest reputation, among both Allied and enemy pilots, for their achievements as fighter escort pilots. While under the protection of Davis's fighter escort unit, not one bomber was ever lost to the enemy.

24 In 1948 President Truman's Executive Order 9981 ended segregation in the services, and Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., continued his life of accomplishments. Davis became the first black general in the U.S. Air Force in 1954. He was the first black man to command an Army air base and the first to become a lieutenant general. Following duty in Korea, General Davis was assigned as chief of staff for the United Nations Command and the U.S. Forces in Korea. In 1967 he assumed command of the Thirteenth Air Force. General Davis retired in 1970. In 1975 President Ford appointed him Assistant Secretary of Transportation. In 1999 President Clinton advanced him to the rank of four-star general.

25 The Tuskegee Airmen who served under Davis remember him as stern but inspiring. One said that Davis was "the most positive commander I ever had. He stressed the awful price of failure." Another said, "Davis was respected by most and hated by some, but it was because of the discipline he exacted that we were able to make the record we did."

This text is an excerpt from the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum's Teacher Guide for "African American Pioneers in Aviation: 1920-Present". This publication is available online at <http://www.nasm.si.edu/education/pubs/aviation.pdf>

Dogs vs. Terrorists

By Burkhard Bilger

1 It's a hectic Wednesday morning at Times Square, the busiest subway station in New York City. Thousands of commuters are rushing to work. A new team from the transit canine unit is just arriving. The team has four police officers, each paired with a dog.

2 Large, pointy-eared, and powerful, these dogs make people nervous. On subway trains, they stare at passengers with unswerving intensity; every time the train doors open, they pivot to scan the crowds on the platforms. Each dog weighs close to 200 pounds. Their jaws can deliver 750 pounds of pressure-enough to chew through steel.



And in preparation for their police work, they have received as much training as a battle-ready U.S. soldier.

3 The team has been at Times Square for only a few moments when one of the dogs, a large German shepherd named Thunder, erupts into ferocious barks. A few feet away, a man crouches next to a pillar. Thunder clearly perceives this man as a threat.

4 "Show your hands!" shouts the officer holding Thunder's leash.

5 But the man ignores the officer's command. Suddenly, he lunges toward the cop, who immediately lets go of the leash.

6 Thunder leaps into the air with lightning speed. His jaws clamp down around the man's arm.

7 "Get this dog off of me!" the man screams. He manages to break away, but within a few steps, Thunder is on him again, jerking him to the ground.

8 The suspect has been subdued.

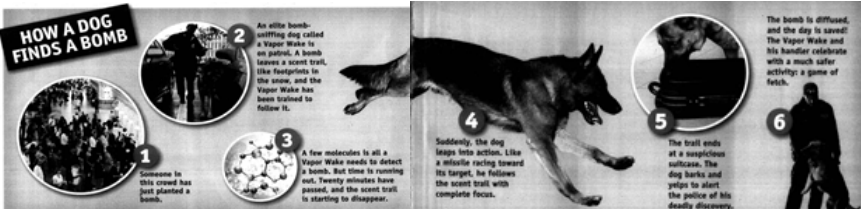
Natural Super Soldier

9 Dogs serve in two roles within the New York City Police Department. Some are "detection dogs," trained to sniff out explosives and drugs. Others, like Thunder, are patrol dogs, which hunt down criminals.

10 Patrol dogs have one of the most dangerous jobs in public life. In the past year, four have been killed or seriously injured in the line of duty. They are also strikingly effective. Sending in "jaws and paws" intimidates even the most hardened criminals. In 2010, one subway station on the Lexington Avenue line was hit by 20 muggings and thefts in a matter of months. Once a canine unit began patrolling the station, the number dropped to zero.

11 As a species, dogs were made for this sort of work. No other animal so diligently aims to please humans. A good dog is a natural super soldier: strong yet acrobatic, fierce yet obedient. It can leap higher than most of us, and run twice as fast. Its eyes are equipped for night vision, its ears for super-sonic hearing, its mouth for subduing prey.

12 But a dog's true glory is its nose. Dogs can detect just a few tiny particles of a substance-like the fleck of a cookie crumb at the bottom of your backpack. Just as astonishing is a dog's acuity; it can identify different substances within a scent, like the spices in a soup.



13 How? A dog sniffs with short, sharp breaths—as many as 10 per second—drawing the scent deep into its nasal cavity. The receptors there are a hundred times denser than in a human and can pick up on a wide array of particles. Drug smugglers often try to mask the smell of their shipments by packaging them with coffee beans, air fresheners, or sheets of fabric softener. But it takes more than that to fool a dog.

14 Paul Waggoner, a behavioral scientist at the Canine Detection Research Institute at Auburn University in Alabama, conducted a test to prove it. He flooded his lab with different scents, then added tiny quantities of different illegal drugs. In one case, "The whole lab smelled like a Starbucks," Waggoner recalls.

15 The dogs had no trouble homing in on the drugs. "They're just incredible at finding the needle in the haystack," Waggoner says.

The Best of the Best

16 Police dogs are heirs to an ancient and fierce bloodline. For thousands of years, dogs marched into battle with their human companions. The great mastiffs and sight hounds of Mesopotamia wreaked havoc on the battlefield. Dogs ran with Attila the Hun's hordes and wore battle armor beside the knights of the Middle Ages. In 1495, when

Christopher Columbus sailed to what is now the Dominican Republic, he brought greyhounds that could run down an enemy and rip out his guts. During World War I, Germany fielded 30,000 dogs and used them for everything from transporting medicine and wounded soldiers to carrying messages between trenches. The German shepherd, first registered as a breed in 1889 by a former German cavalry captain, was favored during the war for its intelligence and steadiness as well as its power.

17 Today, a variety of breeds are used in police work. Labradors, for instance, are superior sniffers, while German shepherds are preferred for patrol. Regardless of their breed, almost all American police dogs are imported from Europe. They come mainly from Germany, where dogs have been carefully bred for centuries. Once in America, they receive a year of intense training at one of several canine training facilities around the country. Those that don't make the cut in training usually become service dogs (such as guide dogs for the blind). Only the most gifted are recruited to work for the NYPD.

18 Once a group of new police dogs arrives in New York City, each dog is carefully matched with a police officer. For the next six weeks, each cop-and-dog team builds its working relationship, learning each other's cues and idiosyncrasies.

19 But the real goal of this training period is to put the dog under the full command of the officer. An officer who loses control of his or her dog in a chaotic environment like a New York City subway station risks disaster. These dogs are inherently aggressive, and if they go too far, someone could be injured – or worse. This is the hardest part of canine work – being able to put “the emergency brakes” on a

dog that is capable of biting through human bone.

A Unique Bond

20 To understand the raw power and energy of these animals, one needs to spend just a few minutes at the NYPD's canine training facility in Long Island City. There, the dogs are kept in cages when they aren't working with their human partners. They find the confinement hard to bear. When their partners walk into the room, the dogs go crazy. Foam flies from their muzzles. Some chew their cages, reducing steel to bits of twisted scrap metal. They often break their teeth, yet keep chewing.

21 The moment that the cages are opened, however, the noise stops. The dogs trot silently to their partners' sides, then sit back on their haunches-ears erect, eyes focused forward-and wait for instructions. As one trainer puts it, "It's like you've turned on a switch." Indeed, canine police tend to talk about their dogs as if the animals are mechanical devices. They say that their dogs need "maintenance" to be "fully operational," and that a "dual-purpose dog" one that has been taught both to chase down criminals and detect drugs or explosives has "superior functionality." In the field, a dog is a piece of critical gear. And yet, officer and dog forge a unique bond. Off duty, each dog lives with its partner and its partner's family. Like an enduring marriage, these partnerships tend to last for life.

They Are Ready

22 Back at the bustling Times Square subway station, it quickly becomes clear that the man Thunder has taken down is not a criminal or a terrorist. He is an undercover transit cop- a decoy disguised as a troublemaker. He was part of a test for the new canine unit.

23 Thunder wasn't supposed to take the decoy down to the ground, but it wasn't Thunder's fault that he did. The decoy shouldn't have tried to run away-that wasn't part of the plan. It was up to Thunder's partner to call the dog back.

24 Thunder is given high marks. Since September 11, the NYPD has doubled the size of its canine force. There are now 100 dogs like Thunder patrolling the city. And they are ready.

Adapted from "Beware of the Dogs" by Burkhard Bilger from the February 27, 2012, issue of The New Yorker. ©2012 by Burkhard Bilger. Used by permission of the author.

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