Horsing Around

When it comes to guiding blind people from place to place, it’s no longer just a dog’s world. Pygmy horses are now on the job, too. They’re proving that tiny horses can be a big help to people in need.

Small Wonder
Pygmy horses are miniature, or little, horses born with short legs. In fact, their legs are so short that the horses only grow to about two feet tall. A regular horse grows to about five feet tall. The small size of pygmy horses makes it easy for them to pass through doors, or get into elevators and cars.

Practice Makes Perfect
Guide horses are trained at the Guide Horse Foundation in North Carolina. Janet Burleson is one of the owners and horse trainers at the foundation.

“It takes about nine months for a horse to learn how to help blind people,” Burleson says. During that time, the horses learn commands like “forward,” “back,” and “stop.” They also learn how to walk with an
owner, and to avoid obstacles, or things that get in the way.

The horses spend two weeks in training with their blind owners before moving in with them. “We have found homes for two guide horses,” Burleson says, “and the owners couldn’t be happier.”

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**Guide Dog vs. Guide Horse**

Dogs and pygmy horses are two animal species trained to guide blind people. Here’s how they compare.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>GUIDE DOG</strong></th>
<th><strong>GUIDE HORSE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>life span</strong></td>
<td>10 to 12 years</td>
<td>30 to 40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>food</strong></td>
<td>Dog food</td>
<td>Grass and oats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>vision</strong></td>
<td>Can see very well at night;</td>
<td>Can see very well at night;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>has eyes at the front of its</td>
<td>has eyes on the side of its head—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>head—allows the dog to see</td>
<td>allows the horse to see things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>things in front of it.</td>
<td>in front and on its sides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>home life</strong></td>
<td>Lives indoors, and does not</td>
<td>Lives indoors, but needs a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>need a backyard</td>
<td>backyard where it can eat grass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Horsing Around

Fill in the circle next to the correct answer.

1. How long does it take to train a guide horse?
   A two weeks
   B one month
   C nine months
   D one year

2. What do a guide dog and guide horse have in common?
   A They both live to be over 20 years old.
   B They both live inside homes.
   C They both have trouble seeing at night.
   D They both wear special shoes.

3. Which word means the same as small?
   A little
   B miniature
   C tiny
   D all of the above

4. Which part of the body is used for vision?
   A legs
   B stomach
   C eyes
   D back

5. List three facts about pygmy horses that you learned from the article.
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
Horsing Around

Complete the graphic organizer below. Write how a guide dog and a guide horse are alike and different.

Guide Dog               Guide Dog and Horse               Guide Horse
DIFFERENT           SAME           DIFFERENT

Write About It

Find out about other animals that help people. These include dogs, cats, horses, monkeys, and rabbits. Pick one animal and learn more about how it is trained to help people.