



Through a Dog's Eyes: Understanding Our Dogs by Understanding How They See the World

Jennifer Arnold

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A stirring, inspiring book with the power to change the way we understand and communicate with our dogs.

Few people are more qualified to speak about the abilities and potential of dogs than Jennifer Arnold, who for the past twenty years has trained service dogs for people with physical disabilities and special needs. Arnold has developed a unique understanding of dogs' capabilities, intelligence, sensitivity, and extra-sensory skills. Her training method is based on teaching dogs to make choices—as opposed to following commands—through kindness and encouragement rather than fear and submission, and her results are extraordinary. To Arnold, dogs are neither wolves in need of a pack leader nor babies in need of coddling; rather, they are extremely trusting beings attuned to their owners' needs and they aim to please. Relationships between dogs and humans go awry when we fail to understand our dogs and when we send them confusing, mixed signals. Arnold's firsthand experience—from what moved her to start her exemplary nonprofit and how she developed her methodology—guides this book and gives it a powerful emotional heft. Stories drawn from Arnold's life and the lives of the dogs who were her greatest teachers are convincing, unforgettable, and compelling testimony and make this book a heart-warming, captivating read that will forever change the way you see your dog by showing you the way your dog sees the world.

Through a Dog's Eyes: Understanding Our Dogs by Understanding How They See the World Details

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James says

Listened to on CD. Very heart warming story of a person that train service. If you are a dog person, well worth checking out. Some very helpful tips at the end in regards to training.

David says

If you own or are planning on getting a dog, or if you just want to learn quite a lot about this familiar species in an entertaining and emotionally charged set of stories, you must read this book. It has great advice for training, and in particular training that doesn't involve excessive shame or rely on physical violence. But even if you have no dogs or already have well-trained dogs, there are the stories of dogs and the invaluable impact they have had on the lives of the humans who knew and loved them. And if that doesn't sell you on the book, the author has done an amateur but revealing and exciting investigation into current studies on dog psychology and cognitive capacity. Think your little Fido is just a dumb animal or is intentionally disobeying you and trying to defy your authority? Think again. The book has implications for how we treat this amazing species as well as for uninformed breeding goals. In short, whether you already think you know all about dogs or whether you confess you just know they are furry with wet noses, there is something inspiring and educational you can take away from this fun and easy read.

Jean Gill says

What a treasure for a dog-lover! A rich mix of anecdotes, teaching suggestions and thoughts on current research, based on twenty years' experience training golden retrievers and labradors as companions for people with special needs.

The opening chapter describes Jennifer Arnold's personal circumstances and the background to her life's work as founder of Canine Assistants, one of the USA's largest canine service associations. This personal context is the basis of the whole book and I found the author to be good dog-loving company, with extensive experience in a particular sector of the dog world. I trust her integrity and her anecdotes ring true, reminding us of how wonderful the relationship between dog and human can be, beyond the current explanations of science.

I was already fascinated by dogs' unexplained capacity to predict epileptic seizures, so it was interesting to read of how this emerges in the training of Canine Assistants. I enjoyed all the tales of how various service dogs have enabled their new owners to live fuller lives. My favourite chapter, however, was that on play; it made me want to rush outside with my Great Pyrenees and bounce. I've spent hours observing and photographing my own dogs' play habits, and I've never read such detailed, accurate accounts of dogs' play behaviour, with each other and with humans. I couldn't agree more with Arnold over the importance of play for both our species.

I already agree with Arnold's principles, especially in ridiculing the idea that we should behave like wolves.

She gave me some useful supporting evidence for my views, and I was delighted to learn that alpha wolves in the wild feed the weakest in the family/pack first, thereby suggesting that even the 'behave like a wolf' brigade are wrong in their theories of food control and 'eating first' to dominate.

I also fully support 'choice training', teaching a dog to think and to choose the desired behaviour, and she gives detailed examples, all useful, of how she works. There are limitations though. I have been taught by a top dogtrainer how to put principles into practice and in my view Arnold's techniques will not work with all dogs. She does warn the reader that the book is not a training manual for dealing with dog problems and she also states that you should get a trainer's help if your dog bites you or someone else, so this book does not pretend to cover all situations.

Arnold relies heavily on treats, works with golden retrievers and labradors, and matches the personalities of adult dogs with their new owners, and with their special needs. This is admirable but very different from establishing a relationship between any puppy/dog and any owner. I remember getting a Great Pyrenees after the death of my retriever, and discovering that chocolate buttons for dogs had lost their magic power, and toys were no better. Suddenly, I was not the wonderful dog trainer I'd thought myself; I was someone whose dog didn't come when called, and I'd run out of techniques.

This is an informative and enjoyable book on a particular sector of the dog world, and on specific aspects of training. If you're looking for a general book on training all dogs, I'd recommend 'Gentle Dog Training' by Michel Hasbrouck. In the wider context of all dogs, I think Arnold is naive in some of her statements, such as her assertion that using the leash to force a position is wrong (e.g. 'sit' or to stop the dog jumping up) and that positive reinforcement will bring the dog to the desired conclusions of its own accord, eventually. (Believe me, if you've had 70kg of Great Pyrenees knocking your glasses off, 'eventually' is not a word you want to hear).

Although I would disagree over some specifics of training, I would love to debate these with Arnold, and I have the impression that she would enjoy that debate, and have excellent reasons for the way she works. As she points out, most dogs want nothing better than to please us and communicate with us, so those brutal modern methods which promote domination are to be shunned.

I couldn't agree more and I see it as a sad sign of the times that Arnold has been targeted for vicious criticism by those who feel their methods are threatened. In a letter published on her amazon page she wrote, 'At times I am straightforward to the point of bluntness about the wrongs we are doing to our dogs in the name of training. In some circles, I'm already being criticised for what I have written. I wish I could say that the unpleasantness doesn't bother me a bit. I can't. I am all too human. But it won't stop me. I owe dogs too much to be silent. we all do.'

Good for you, Jennifer Arnold. Keep up the good work.

Lindsay says

'Our dogs never grow past the point of seeing us as their universe. Is it any wonder we adore them?'

We have had our dog for just about two years now, and she is our first dog. Although I write this review myself, I say 'we' because she is certainly a member of the family - she is my dog and my husband's, (and also very fond of my in-laws too!) We have been through puppy training with her, and gone to a beginner's

training class too, and have learned many useful tips along the way. There are always challenges though; she is still quite young and is very exuberant and enthusiastic about just about everything! I was therefore really interested to read this book and discover the author's theories about looking at the world through the eyes of our dogs.

The subtitle to this book is key to the approach taken inside it -'understanding our dogs by understanding how they see the world.'

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Jennifer Arnold has been training service dogs for over twenty years. These dogs go on to assist people with physical disabilities and special needs. The things they achieve, the tasks they are able to accomplish, and the support they can offer, is truly awe-inspiring:

'Working with children and adults who have mobility difficulties or seizure conditions, these incredible dogs learn to do a variety of tasks, such as turning lights on and off, opening and closing doors, pushing buttons, picking up dropped objects, and running for help in an emergency. They transform lives with their constant companionship and unconditional love in ways that no human can equal.'

This book is an inspirational read, both in terms of the stories Jennifer Arnold recounts about the dogs she has trained, and in terms of inspiring us as dog owners to rethink what we know about our dogs, and to reconsider how things might look to our dogs. It offers us a wealth of ideas, drawn from the author's experience of working with dogs every day, that we can think about when spending time with our own dogs, and thereby improve our relationships with them. I thought the sections on body language were particularly interesting and enlightening. There are sections where the author considers the origins of dogs – including discussing wolves and dogs, their personalities, language and characters, discusses play and also her choice teaching methods.

The author looks at the world as she believes dogs see it and experience it. She has learnt so much in terms of understanding dogs – their skills and intelligence, the things they are capable of doing. In this book Jennifer Arnold puts forward her approach to training, based not on the alpha dominance type theory of physical correction but instead on encouraging the dog to make the right choice, and by using positive reinforcement, treating the dog kindly. She advises us to 'use only positive motivation to convince the dog that it is in his best interest to do as asked.' She explains that she herself only developed and moved over to this method over time:

'My approach to handling changed as my understanding of dogs grew, until one day I realized that it was morally wrong to treat dogs with anything other than patience, understanding, and kindness. I have come to appreciate that dogs are capable of deep feeling, that they have individual personalities and intellectual capacities, extraordinary at times. Most of all I have learned that, beyond all other species, dogs have evolved to be our partners, protectors and helpmates.'

I enjoyed reading about the dogs Jennifer has worked with and learned from; there are some heartwarming and very moving true stories contained here, and the dogs that go on to make a positive difference are evidence of the efficacy of her methods. She offers scientific support for her theories. I think there is a lot to be said for the philosophy that this author puts forward. If anything I would have liked to have read even more stories about the dogs she has trained.

This is an enlightening read, and after finishing this book, I felt I looked at my dog in a new way and I have definitely learned a lot about dog behaviour. Additionally, I've learned different techniques that I might use to communicate better with my dog, and I developed a greater understanding of dogs as a species. This book

is a fascinating, informative and worthwhile read for any dog owner.

Stacey says

My rating - 2 1/2 stars

The good: The book is by an experienced trainer, espouses the current thinking in dog training using positive reinforcements as advocated by experts, debunks the BS that is dog whisperers false ideas on alpha dog and dominance, and gives a lot of great insight for regular dog owners.

The bad: mixing and matching references to research without recognizing which is good science and which is bunk. The chapter on ESP - really??? That inclusion of this chapter could make some readers question everything else presented in this book, even the information backed up by solid research (e.g. Patricia McConnell's work).

The interesting: I worry about the education and intellectual capabilities of some people who reviewed this book and thought it too "sciency". It wasn't, although this may explain why there are way too many people who don't understand the scientific basis for things such as climate change, evolution, etc.

Antonia says

This was a really thought-provoking and magnificent book that opened my eyes even more to the magical and intriguing world of dogs. As I am about to become a veterinarian (currently in University), this book played a significant role to my academic career as it taught me that dogs are far more intelligent and sentimental than the majority of people think they do.

Overall, 4 out of 5 stars and I strongly recommend it to people who already own dogs, but even more to those who don't. Most animals -but especially dogs- have a wide range of feelings and reactions to these feelings, and it's sad that most people aren't able and willing to discover just how many they've got. Jennifer Arnold will totally make you fall in love with your little partner and, at the same time, she will help you grow this relationship to a deeper and more mature level.

Ingrid M. says

"We long for an affection altogether ignorant of our faults. Heaven has accorded this to us in the uncritical canine attachment." Jennifer Arnold provided a wealth of information that really helped me see my dog in a different light. As she notes, so much of what dogs do is about soliciting information, and the habits and quirks my own dog exhibits are attempts to interact with me to get more information about a particular situation. For example, my dog will sometimes bark excessively, though he isn't much of a barker, when people come to the door-particularly family he knows. Arnold made me see that he is simply seeking confirmation of what is happening/seeking to test a hypothesis, and how I react to him will greatly influence his next move. We are big Cesar Millan fans in our house because much of what he says just makes sense to us, but even understanding his techniques does not mean they are necessarily successful with Valentino. I "get" what Cesar talks about, but am also aware I'm not executing the techniques properly so I don't really

feel comfortable employing them. Having read Arnold's book, I started to think a lot more deeply about what Cesar says with his alpha training techniques, and I've started to think twice about them given that Arnold explained how different dogs are from wolves. Dogs descended from wolves, but to fashion our training models on wolf behavior (usually through observation of wolves, and captive ones at that) has made me see that this practice could not only be erroneous, but dangerous to our dogs. I like that she was careful not to anthropomorphize the dogs she has worked with in certain situations, not lending herself to overly emotional recollections, but I really like that she made it obvious dogs have greater cognitive abilities than we sometimes give them credit for and that these have their limitations. Her method of Choice Teaching made me curious to learn more, and I may employ these positive reinforcement tips on Valentino, but like she wrote, I'm not letting anyone dictate how the bond my dog and I share should look like.

Colleen says

I didn't think a book about dogs could be so infuriating. The ultimate problem with this book is that she presents good science along with utter crap and treats them equally as long as they coincide with what she believes anyway. Do dogs understand the concept of fairness, or do they stop responding when you stop rewarding them? Do dogs have ESP, or are they just really well attuned to small signals (especially after tons of dedicated training)? I'm going to be using examples from this book in my research methods class as examples of bad logic. Of all the books out there on dog behavior, this is probably one of the last that should be read.

Shelby says

4 Stars

I really enjoyed reading this book for many reasons. One reason is because you get a chance to understand what dogs see and also think about things and how they even react to things. The downfall for me was that I thought I would learn more than what I thought I would of. I guess the reason was because I have 3 dogs and I know how they react to things, but every dog is different. In this book it provided great facts about dogs but some of the facts I already knew from having dogs myself. I would probably wouldn't read this book again just because I knew more than what I thought. Overall I would recommend this book to anyone that is a dog lover and wants to learn more about dogs.

Bana says

I suppose it's a good cursory look at canine psychology, but there are other more in-depth reads that I've found more helpful. One thing that bothered me throughout was the fact that "special" behaviors - like aggression - were tacitly mentioned and in a few cases, resulted in euthanasia due to owner ignorance (like the time she was bitten by a dog who she later learned was put down for his aggression). To the author's credit, she puts the blame squarely on the owners' shoulders, but there wasn't a lot of talk about rehabilitating those dogs or how the philosophies she proposes throughout the book apply to more headstrong kiddos. In the appendix, she does give a catch-all to see a behaviorist for those cases, but it did bother me that the implication here is that all dogs are happy and eager to be trained, when in reality, there are always special cases. Other than this big-picture thing, the book was fine and obviously penned by someone with a great passion for dogs, which is always nice to see.

Jennifer says

I really enjoyed reading this book, from the human tragedy of the first chapter to the very succinct guidance on specific dog cues (as she calls 'commands') at the back.

I do sense a real desperation amongst many authors of books on dog psychology and behaviour who fundamentally want to scream at the public "PLEASE, please, please don't do what Cesar Milan does" but you don't sell more product than he does that way. There was a little of that here.

It's also quite a mishmash of 'how dogs and people got here' (which is covered at more length by John Bradshaw in "In Defence of Dogs") an account of her life and her organisation Canine Assistants, many moving anecdotes and scientific snippets. I felt she could usefully have provided proper references so people could follow up the original papers. I could personally have done with less on telepathy and ESP but the whole book is written in a very pleasant style. There was very little tone (as you get in some books) of "look at these stupid owners and look how clever I am"

Ratforce says

For a unique perspective on dog training, try *Through a Dog's Eyes*. It is written by Jennifer Arnold, who has a long history of training assistance dogs and is based on a show that Arnold filmed through PBS. She wrote this book as a direct challenge to current dog training styles that emphasize dominance and fear and instead calls for training methods that are focused on mutual respect and understanding of a dog's mental and physical abilities. It is part memoir, part non-profit operation manual, and part canine biology and psychology textbook.

Kim says

This is a fantastic book - I'm a veterinarian with a special interest in behavior, and on an almost daily basis I find I have to battle against information that trainers such as Cesar Milan employ - dominance methods do NOT help in the vast majority of cases, and can often make many problems worse. Yes, he does say some common sense things that make sense (such as the importance of exercising your pets), but many of his methods are based on old research of wolf packs that were artificially formed in captivity and do not reflect how true wolf packs actually work. Also, dogs may have evolved from wolves, but they are NOT wolves! We have selected traits and behaviors over thousands of years that have created a completely different species with their own unique set of behaviors.

Jennifer Arnold promotes positive reinforcement, and truly understands how a dog thinks and works. And her views are not unique - many other prominent researchers, behaviorists, and veterinarians also have proven these methods. Unfortunately, Cesar Milan is more prominent in the media (I usually like Oprah, but I am still very angry at her for the introduction of Cesar Milan to the mass public). She intertwines personal stories from her experiences with her non-profit organization (Canine Assistants) with brief synopses of

canine behavioral research. The book finishes with several chapters on basic behavioral "training" (I use the word "training" in quotation marks as she does not like this term) for many common issues dog owners face.

I will highly recommend this book to my clients, along with Sophia Yin's "How To Behave So Your Dog Behaves" and Jean Donaldson's "Culture Clash." These books should be on every dog owner's "Must Read" list.

Angie says

Jennifer Arnold is clear, concise, and very organized in her in-depth research of dogs and the reasons for their behavior. Yes, I sobbed at different parts that I found utterly endearing or heartbreaking, and laughed at others, and came to appreciate my own dogs so much more than I've ever done before.

I also got the answer I've been searching for in my frustrated relationship with dogs as a cat person. No, I don't have to shout to get my dogs to cooperate. No, I don't have to get mad at how unruly my dogs are acting. Yes, I can love my dogs unconditionally and look at the beauty of their characters, and how I might be able to tap into the "positive" behavior I want them to exhibit by showing positive behavior of my own.

I have been unknowingly cruel to far too many dogs in my life, and this book cold not have come to me soon enough. The approach that Arnold espouses is one that feels right to me, even if I never get to the training of assistance dogs. Just knowing what I've learned about dogs from her has changed my perspective to a much more loving and compassionate, appreciative and supportive view of my canine buddies.

Just one of Arnold's amazing recommended practices is, if you can't teach a dog out of a certain behavior, then take away the situation that would ever allow that dog to exhibit that behavior in the first place. Example: Counter-surfing. Instead of fear-training them to leave food on the counter alone, or squirting them, shouting, swatting with a newspaper or anything else, just DON'T LEAVE FOOD ON THE COUNTER. Situation solved.

I highly recommend this book for anyone who ever comes into contact with dogs!

Nicole says

3.5 stars

I'm so interested in learning about service dogs, so this was a perfect read. Also a great read for understanding a dog and the best way to train them.
