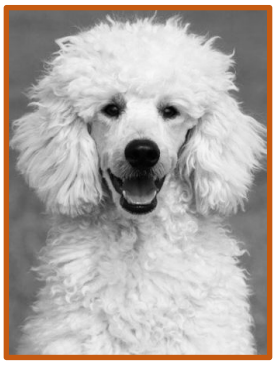
Four Paws Canine Courtesy Class

Max

Kukka

Artie



Pete

Sarah

The classroom's blue door opened with a squeak.

Max rolled in like a squat army tank and surveyed the four dogs seated before him, ears alert. Kukka, Artie, Sarah and Pete, a poodle. At least they're all sitting and ready to pay attention. Max puffed up his bulldog chest and began, "Okay, pooches and pups, welcome to the Four Paws Canine Courtesy Class. Today we are going to learn to stop eating sticks."

Kukka sniffed… *he smells like a bulldog…* glanced at Max… *looks like a bulldog…* and frowned… *but why would a bulldog say that about sticks?*

Kukka had long, puffy black and white fur. Max gazed hard at her, like he could tell what she was thinking. She gave a little tail wag to show she was friendly. Max reacted with a low growl and turned to the others. "Now, my little Four Paw pooches, there are good dogs," he paused and gave a steely look, "and there are BAD dogs."

"Oooh," the dogs murmured.

"And BAD dogs…" Max paused for effect, "…eat sticks!"

Sarah, the golden retriever, cringed, ears down.

Max smiled. But it wasn't a nice smile. "Listen up, Pooches and pups. If you pay attention and learn today's lesson… then maybe you can be a good dog." Max puffed himself up as tall as he could on his squat bulldog legs. "Are we ready to learn?"

Sarah stopped cringing. Artie, the boxer, gave his tail a gentle wag.

Max looked at the dogs one by one. "Pooches and pups, today's lesson is: BAD dogs eat sticks! And get sick. All over the carpet!"

All four dogs bowed their heads and lowered their eyes.

Max gave a low growl. "You don't want to be a BAD dog, do you?"

"No," they all said, with a little whimper.

"No bad dogs," Sarah said.

Max nodded. "No bad dogs." He puffed out his chest again. "So, you can chase sticks, catch sticks, play pull with sticks. What do you not do?"

"Eat sticks?" Artie said.

"Right!" said Max, in his gruff bulldog voice. "Eating sticks is BAD!"

"Wait! Sticks are bad?" said Pete.

"Oh. Don't like that word," Sarah said.

"How come?" Kukka said. "Love sticks!" She wagged her tail and went off to sniff-smell Pete.

Sarah scratched behind her ear. "Sticks aren't bad," she said quietly.

"What?" Max said. "Got an itch?"

"Oh, sorry," Sarah said and sat upright. "You said eating sticks is bad?"

"Right!" Max turned to the other dogs. "So why are we here?"

"Sticks!" said Sarah, Pete and Artie. Sarah got up to sniff-smell Artie. Pete sniff-smelled Kukka.

"DOGS! Pay attention!" Max growled, glaring.

Sarah froze and then sat. Artie froze and laid down. Kukka stayed, sitting at attention. Pete sat, but peeked out the window, hoping to see the stick he'd dropped. Kukka did a sit-stay.

"This feels like school," Artie said, sitting at attention.

"Looking good, Artie," Sarah said. Artie was pure bred. He could sit like a show dog.

Max looked from dog to dog. "Class, what are sticks good for?"

"Fetch!" Artie said. "Watch the stick sail through the air. And fetch it!"

"Yes!" Sarah said. "Bring it back. Get a treat."

"Treats!" said Kukka and Pete at the same time.

"Do we get treats?" Artie said, standing up. "Yes! A treat!" Kukka said, wagging her tail. "We're good dogs, right?"

Pete did a play bow and went to sniff-smell Kukka. "Kukka, what's your favorite?"

Kukka did a play bow too. "Oh, that's a hard one."

"STOP! SIT! HEEL!" Max barked, eyes bugging out. "Just hold your horses!"

"Horses?" Pete said.

"What does that even mean?" Sarah said, looking around. "Don't see any horses."

"Why did he say heel?" Pete said, sitting.

"Heel goes with walking, not talking," Kukka said, sitting.

Max shook himself and started panting. "Pooches! Pay attention!"

"We were all sitting, right?" Pete said.

"Yes. It was a sit-stay," Kukka said.

"No, just a sit," Artie said.

"No stay?" Kukka said.

"Not today. No way," Artie said.

Sarah gave a shake from head to tail. "Why are sticks bad?" Sarah said, very quietly.

Kukka wagged her tail and perked up her ears. "What happened to treats?"

"We're not talking about treats," Max whined and started to pace.

"Peanut butter chews," Kukka said to Pete, licking her lips. "All-time best treat!"

Pete licked his lips. "Yes, yes!"

"Look so fine and so good to chew," Kukka sang.

"Yes! Love those!" Pete said, tail wagging.

"Have some today, so good for you," Kukka sang.

"Pete, settle down!" Max barked louder. "Kukka, stop singing!"

"My favorite, too," Artie said.

"STICKS!" Max barked. "WE'RE TALKING ABOUT STICKS!"

"Don't have to bark so loud," Sarah said.

"Sticks have High Chew Ability," Kukka said. "Get it?"

"Get the stick?" Pete said, getting up and pointing with his paw.

"Where?" Artie said, at full alert.

"No! No! No!" Max whined, pacing back and forth.

"High Chew Ability." Sarah smiled. "That sounds nice.

"Yeah. Sticks are cool," Kukka said.

"Peanut butter chews are cool too!" Pete said.

"Looks so fine and so good to chew," Pete sang.

Max puffed up and barked, "DON'T EAT STICKS! DON'T EAT STICKS!"

"Too loud," Pete said.

Artie shook his head. "Use your inside voice."

"Chew 'em and eat 'em up," Pete said.

"Me too," Kukka said, tail wagging. "Sticks rock!"

"Don't forget me," Sarah said. "Love those cute little crunchy munchies."

"We love you sticks!" Artie said.

"We get our kicks from sticks!" Kukka said, doing a play bow and quick bark.

"Sticks are better than tricks!" Pete said, doing a play bow.

"Sticks are my picks," Sarah said, wagging her tail. She trotted over to Artie.

"Five, six, pick up sticks," Artie said. He gave a sharp play bark and bowed to Sarah. Sarah gave her own play bark, bowed, spun around and started to run. Artie gave chase. It was a romp! Kukka and Pete joined in, dashing around the room as fast as they could go.

Head on paws, Max whined, "don't eat sticks," as the four dogs raced round and round with quick happy barks. Ears back, tails wagging and feet flying, the room was a blur of fur.