**FABULOUS FELINES**

**LESSON 1: Grades 4-6**

**HOW TO CHOOSE THE PURRRFECT CAT**

**Curriculum Connections, Standards addressed:**

**Academic Goals:** 1.2, 1.3, 1.8, 4.1, 4.2

**Knowledge Goals:** Communication Arts: 6; Science: 3

**Objective:** To introduce students to the concept that the decision to get a pet is not something to enter into lightly and to realize this is a 14-18 year commitment, for the life of the cat. To teach them how to choose a cat companion.

**Common Core-aligned activities:**

**SL.5.lc - Pose and respond to specific questions and make comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.**

Have a spelling bee with a difference! Poll the class for “all things cat”….what does a cat do? What do they need? How do they enhance our lives? If you were a cat, what would you want? Share these questions ahead of time with the students and ask them to work in teams to conduct their research. Ask them to create a list of 25 words related to the needs of cats. Each team can conduct a spelling bee with the other teams responding. Each word is worth three points (one point each for: spelling the word correctly, identifying how this is needed for the well-being of a cat, what happens if this need is overlooked.)

**Character Concepts:** Respect, Responsibility, Caring, Citizenship

**Respect:** Treating other living creatures with the care and treatment they deserve to live a healthy, happy and whole life. Being considerate of the feelings of others. Never harming, hurting, hitting, threatening or bullying a creature that can’t speak up for themselves.

**Responsibility:** Following the “golden rule” to treat another being as you would want to be treated. This includes providing the essentials of a healthy existence, especially for animals that can’t speak for themselves.

**Caring:** Being kind to creatures. Being compassionate and showing you are concerned for their well-being.

**Citizenship:** Doing what is necessary to provide properly for your pet, including the vaccinations and licensing that are required in your community. Protecting the welfare of animals in your community by keeping your cat indoors and away from harm.

**STEM initiatives: Thinking critically in the connections to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math**

**LS4.D** How will the habitat, i.e. living environment, you create for a new pet impact their health and longevity? How can you (people) influence an animals’ environment positively or negatively? What are the results?

**3LS1-1** Using the information gathered, predict a pattern of behavior/health for a new pet if all the necessary needs of the pet are met? What if the needs are not met adequately? What factors can effects these results?

**Materials Needed :**

* Paper or poster board
* Old magazines
* Glue
* Scissors
* Crayons, markers or colored pencils

## DOWNLOAD Handout: “To Cat or Not-to-Cat” Quiz

* DOWNLOAD Handout: “How Old is Your Cat?”
* DOWNLOAD Handout: “One Cat’s Tale”

**Method:** Introduce the lesson by asking students to review what the word “responsible” means. It means to be depended on, to be reliable, to be held accountable for the care of someone or something. To be a good pet owner, you must be responsible. It is important to know that your responsibilities as a pet owner begin before you even have a pet! You must be responsible for knowing if you are ready to make a pet a part of your family; and if so, for selecting the “right” pet for you and your family.

Cats are wonderful family pets. They are loving, devoted, charming animals. They can be an endless source of entertainment for you and your family. But, they’re also a BIG responsibility.

What are some things your family should consider before they get a pet? A family must consider: how much time they have to spend with a pet; how much money they have to care for a pet; how much space they have intheir home for a pet; if other pets in the household will get along with the new family member; how much work they want to do to take care of a pet; and if they can commit to caring for a pet for the life of the pet (usually about 10-15 years!)

Take the “To-Cat or Not-to-Cat” Quiz home for you and your family to take together. If you answer “no” to three or more of the questions, you may want to reconsider if the time is right to bring a cat into your home.

If you’re ready to care for a cat, there are some things to consider before bringing your new pet home.

*Where should I get my cat?*

Your local animal shelter, animal control or rescue group is the ideal place to look for a cat. You can save a life by adopting a cat (or dog) from a shelter. If you’re looking for a certain breed, approximately 1/3 of all shelter animals are purebred. Shelters also offer adoption counseling to ensure you find just the perfect match. Adoption fees often include the things your cat needs to get a good start in his or her new life – shots, spay/neuter surgery, microchip.

*Should I get an adult cat or a kitten?*

Kittens are hard to resist, but they need lots of extra attention. For many people who are gone all day to work or school, an adult cat is the better choice. Adults need less supervision. Remember kittens don’t stay small forever. They’ll reach their full size in one year. Just for fun, distribute the “How Old is Your Cat?” handout.

*What about adopting more than one?*

More than one adds to the fun! It gives you a break from being the playmate and two can keep each other company when the human members of the family are gone. Look for two littermates that can grow up together, or two adult cats that came from the same household and would like to stay together in a new house. Remember that your cost for care will automatically double.

*How do I know if a cat is healthy?*

Look for the following signs a cat is healthy:

Ears – clean with no discharge.

Eyes – clear, bright, and free from discharge.

Nose – cool, damp, and velvety with no discharge.

Mouth and gums – pale pink color and odor free.

Coat – glossy with no black specks that indicate fleas.

The Rear – clean, with no signs of diarrhea.

Note: Many cats that come from a shelter environment develop upper respiratory infection. This is nothing more than a cold. It is easily transferred in shelters because it is an airborne virus. If your cat starts sneezing, gets watery eyes, or doesn’t seem interested in eating, he may need to visit the vet. Just as with humans there is no cure for the cold, but the vet may prescribe antibiotics to ward off secondary bacterial infections like pneumonia. With some care, your cat will recover and be back to crazy antics in no time!

*How can we find the right personality for our family?*

Look for a feline that is easy-going and responds to you. Kittens should be active, outgoing, and willing to be handled. Adults should be friendly and relaxed when you handle them. If you fall in love with a cat that shies away, he may just need some extra “gentle” love to trust people again. He or she is best suited to a quiet household. Remember that sometimes a shelter animal just needs some time in a safe, relaxed environment to be the outgoing, sweet pet he really is!

*Is a male or female cat more affectionate?*

Both male and female cats are equally affectionate.

No matter what age or sex of cat you choose, when you adopt from a shelter you immediately have a devoted friend for life!

For reinforcement of this lesson, distribute the “One Cat’s Tale” handout; a story with a happy ending about cat adoption.

**Call to Action:** Visit an animal shelter with your family or see if your class can take a field trip. Note the variety of cats. Are there all ages from the tiniest kitten to a senior adult? How do they act differently? Are there a variety of breeds and colors? Which do you like best? Are some cats healthier than others? How can you tell? How would you describe some of the different personalities you see? Talk to a staff member at the shelter. See if there is more information available about the cat you like. Has he lived with other pets? What kind of food does he eat? What kinds of toys does he like to play with? Has he lived with children? Which one do you think would make the best pet for your family?

Find out about the characteristics of a cat you know. It could be your pet, a neighbor’s, relative’s, or a friend’s. Create a collage that shows the characteristics of that cat. Use pictures and words to answer all of the questions above, and why he is a good pet for the family he lives with. Be sure to include a photo or drawing of him! Display the artwork in the school to teach other children about cats.

**Related Reading:**

*Don’t Tell Anyone*, Peg Kehret, 2000 Dutton Children’s Books

12-year-old Megan just wants to care for the feral cats she discovers in an abandoned lot. This exciting novel will have readers enthralled as Megan struggles to protect the cats and herself from a greedy developer and a mysterious stranger. A thoughtful introduction to the dangers facing stray/feral cats and what people can do to help. Ages 9-12.

**Web sites:** Visit our section entitled ***Recommended Web Links*** for animal-related web sites.

**HEY TEACHERS! If your students want more fun, here are some additional hand-outs to download:**

“Pet Care Crossword”

“Going Shopping”

“Pets 4 Life” ---discussion of the pros/cons of various animals and their impact on families. Encourage students to research and prepare persuasive papers or oral presentations about their findings.

(Dear Teachers….This exercise helps reinforce the necessary items needed to take responsible care of a cat while strengthening math and budgeting skills. Your students answers will depend on what items they think are a necessity. It is important to reinforce that nearly all pet care items will have to be replaced over time, due to consumption or wear and tear. Tell students that one of the top reasons people give for relinquishing pets to animal shelter is that pet care costs more than they had anticipated. Besides supplies, other financial costs of pet ownership include routine veterinary care, licensing, kennel or pet sitter costs.)