PET OVERPOPULATION

**LESSON 1: Grades K-3**

# HELP! THERE ARE TOO MANY DOGS AND CATS AND NOT ENOUGH HOMES!

**Curriculum Connections, Standards addressed:**

**Academic Goals:**  1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.6 & 4.7

**Knowledge Goals:**  Communication Arts: 1, 4, 5 & 6; Mathematics: 1 & 3; Science: 7 & 8; Social Studies: 3, 5 & 6; Fine Arts: 1

**Objective:** To help students understand there is a very serious overpopulation problem with cats and dogs.

**Common Core-Aligned Activities:**

**SL.K-2.1—Participate in collaborative conversations with peers and adults.**

Ask students to discuss their love of animals. Why do we love pets? How many have pets? Do they feel all people need to have pets? How do they feel about pets as living, breathing, feeling creatures? What does that mean? What types of responsibilities do we have to our pets? If some of these needs are not met (i.e., food and water) what can happen to our pets? How are these needs similar to our needs? What happens when a pet doesn’t have someone to provide these needs? What happens to animals that don’t have a home to call their own? Is this fair?

**Character Concepts:** Responsibility

Being the guardian of another creature is very important. You hold their welfare in your hands. It is vital you do what you are supposed to do, providing humane and compassionate care to your pet friend.

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

**2-LS2-1—**Events have causes that generate observable patterns.

Cause and Effect are powerful observation tools that can predict patterns. How can cause and effect predict the needs of pets?

**Activity Overview**: There is a serious pet overpopulation in the United States today. Millions of unwanted animals are being *euthanized* (humanely put to death) each year simply because not enough homes can be found. This is a very difficult concept for young children to understand. It is our duty as educators to introduce the concept gently, and encourage students to develop a bond with animals, therefore as they mature, they can proactively make choices that will help the pet overpopulation problem.

## Materials:

* Crayons
* Scissors
* An empty shoe box or similar box
* DOWNLOAD Handout: “Pet Overpopulation”

**Method:** Dogs, cats and rabbits need an operation (*spaying* for females or *neutering* for males) to keep them from having litters of puppies, kittens or bunnies. Everyone loves to see baby animals, but the truth is, not all animals that are born are lucky enough to have loving, caring homes.

(Note to teacher: Every year, tens of millions of stray animals struggle to survive. Nationwide, it is estimated that eight of every ten cats, and six of every ten dogs, must be put to sleep because there are not enough homes for all that are being born. Knowing these steep statistics, you can see the importance of instilling the values of responsible pet ownership, like spaying and neutering, to your students at a very young age.)

Spayed or neutered companion animals live longer, healthier lives than those who haven’t had this simple operation. They are less likely to roam and get in fights. They are happier to be a pet. They are prone to less types of cancers and diseases. Neutered males tend to be more *affectionate* and less *aggressive*. Spaying or neutering your pet will also eliminate unwanted animals. By spaying or neutering your companion animals and encouraging others to do the same, you can help some animals from suffering the tragedy of being born homeless, to live as a stray, or being euthanized.

**Call To Action:** Explore these questions with your students:

* What does being kind to animals mean?
* How can we be kind to animals?
* If every home had one dog and one cat, would all the dogs and cats have a home? Why or why not?
* What responsibilities do we have to animals that we have made our pets?
* What do animal shelters do?

Have students color in the cat and dog faces on the Pet Overpopulation handout. Have them cut the faces out and choose the one they would like to have as a pet. The others will be put in a box labeled “ANIMAL SHELTER.” Discuss with students the uncertainty of the future of those that are not “chosen.” According to national statistics, will they all find homes? What responsibilities do we have to those that are unwanted? Let the children explore options, gently leading them to the realization that there are simply too many wonderful animals being born and not enough responsible homes available.

Were your students made aware of a problem in your community? State? Country? The world? If so, how do they perceive their role in helping to solve this problem? Do your students realize that all animals deserve a good home? Do they understand that all animals that are born are unable to be placed in a permanent home?

**Reading:** Visit our section entitled ***Recommended Children’s Literature*** for a comprehensive listing of animal-related books.

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