SAFETY WITH ANIMALS

Lesson 1: Grades 4-6

Safe Behaviors & Canine Body Language

Curriculum Connections, Standards addressed:

Academic Goals: 1.5, 1.6, 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, & 4.7

Knowledge Goals: Communication Arts: 1, 4, & 6; Fine Arts: 1 & 4; Health & Phys Ed: 5 & 7

Objectives: Students will be able to identify situations in which animals should be left alone. Students will be able to interpret canine body language and react appropriately to warning signs.

Common-Core-Aligned Activities:

SL.5.1—Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Encourage students to discuss the innate differences between various types of animals—wild, domestic. What are our responsibilities as stewards of the earth in regard to animals? How can we make a difference in their welfare?

W.5.7—Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

Research the types of animals you would find in your community. Remember the parks, woodlands, prairies, rivers and lakes. List the animals and their habitats.

W.5.3—Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences.

What types of scenarios can the identified animals in your community experience when they encounter humans?

Character Concepts: Citizenship, Responsibility

Citizenship: How can your actions affect the welfare of people and animals in your community?

Responsibility: What can you do to try to understand the language and needs of animals in your community? If the animals could talk, what would they say about your impact on their lives?

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

4-ESS3-2: Generate and compare multiple solutions to reduce the impacts of natural Earth processes on humans.\*

(\*animals) Our world continues to change and is impacted by the natural changes in our environment. Some of these changes occur naturally; some are caused by man. What are some behaviors of wild animals that are caused by the actions of man? (example…what happens when a natural dam is destroyed by people?) What impact can these actions cause? How might the animals react to this change?

Introduction to Unit: Introduce this unit to your students by explaining that animals are all around us and depend on us to keep them safe. Whether or not they are pets or wild animals that live in our neighborhoods, we owe it to them to do our best to make the world a safer place for both them and us. The student’s role will be to serve as detectives or animal safety sleuths who will scope out situations that aren’t safe for people or animals. Tell them to throw on their cloaks, detective hats and spy-glasses and get rolling!

Materials Needed:

* Colored pencils or markers
* Cardstock or paper
* DOWNLOAD Handout: “Is It Safe to Approach This Animal?” flashcards
* DOWNLOAD Handout: “ASPCA Reading Canine Body Postures”
* DOWNLOAD Handout: Children and Dogs: Important Information for Parents” (send home for parents)
* DOWNLOAD Handout: “Why Dogs Bite: A Guideline for Children” (send home with students)

Method: Introduce this lesson by dividing the class into equally sized detective groups and distributing one of the “Is it safe to approach this animal?” flashcards to each group. Write the following questions on the chalkboard and explain that they will have three minutes to put their detective work to use and analyze their “case”:

1. What is happening in this picture?
2. What is this animal feeling?
3. How might this animal react if you approached him/her?
4. Is this animal safe to approach?
5. Identify one situation that you have been in when you felt the same emotions that this animal was feeling.

When the three minutes are up ask each group to share their flashcards or “cases” and the results of their detective work with the rest of the class.

Discuss the fact that these are all situations in which you should never approach an animal, whether it is your family pet, a neighbor’s pet or especially a wild animal. Place emphasis on the fact that these animals may likely bite, not necessarily because they are mean or aggressive but because they are either fearful, protective or in pain. Stress the fact that animals experience the same emotions that we do and will react if feeling threatened. They often don’t understand our motives and although you may approach the animal to help him/her, they may mistake your actions as harmful ones.

Tell the students that animals often show signs that they are uneasy, scared, or angry by using body language just like we do. Say you are going to have them demonstrate this. Ask four volunteers to come up to the front of the class one at a time to act out an emotion that you whisper in their ear (sad, angry, scared and in pain). Once the students have identified the emotions correctly, pass out the handout titled “Reading Canine Body postures” and read and discuss the diagrams and vocabulary (submission, aggressive, neutral, passive, active and defensive). Explain that the only dog that is approachable in these diagrams is the dog in the *neutral relaxed* position but should only be approached if the owner is present and permission has been granted.

\*Reminder: This is a good time to review what to do if approached by a strange dog and how to meet a dog who is with its owner. Please refer to the lessons 4 & 5 for grades K-3 titled *Stranger* *Danger* and *How to Meet a Dog.*

If an animal is injured or needs help, get an adult or call your local animal welfare organization (humane society, animal control, wildlife organization).

Call to Action: Explain that the detectives are now going to put their knowledge to work by making flip-up cards for younger students in the school. Display the “Is it safe to approach this animal” flashcards in the room so they can be seen by all the students and serve as a reference while creating their flip-up cards. Each group will create a flip-up card for each flashcard (“case”).

Have the students get into their original detective groups and give them several sheets of white paper. Instruct them to fold each paper in half with the crease/fold at the top of the paper so that it will flip open like a calendar. With the paper folded over like this they are to re-create one of the pictures by drawing it on top of the folded card. They are then to flip open the card and write a few short sentences about the case and why you should leave this animal alone. Have them write in pencil so they/you can edit their writing.

For example: Draw a picture of the Momma cat with her babies on the top of the folded flip-up card and then open the card and write something like:

This Momma cat is with her babies.

Leave her alone.

She may think you are going to hurt her babies

and might try to bite you.

Have each group make a complete set of these flip-up cards and arrange a visit to a classroom with younger groups of students so your detectives can share their work and teach others in your school to be safe around animals too!

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

“Pet Safety Jumble”

**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.