Fabulous Felines

**Lesson 4: Grades K-3**

**WhY Do Cats Do That?**

**Curriculum Connections, Standards addressed:**

# **Academic Goals:** Academic Goals: 1.5, 2.1, 2.3

# **Knowledge Goals:** Communication Arts: 1, 4, 6; Science: 3

**Objective:** To provide children with real answers to the curious things cats do.

**Common Core-Aligned Activities:**

**SL.3-4.1—Engage effectively in collaborative discussions building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.**

**SL.3-4.1c—Pose and respond to specific questions and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to remarks of others.**

Ask students to discuss how cats--as living, breathing, feeling creatures---behave. What animals do they look and act like in the wild? How do they display curiosity? Fear? Anger? Affection? How do they communicate with each other? With humans? If some of these needs are not met (i.e., food and water), cats can become very sick and even die. What are the needs of cats? How are they similar to our needs? Discuss.

Using the information you learn through discussion and information gathered from books and online, imagine you are a stray cat living on the streets. How do you feel? What about hunger? (is food available?) Thirst? (is clean water available?) What would your needs be? How can these needs be met? Do you need human intervention? In what ways? What does it feel like to be a stray vs. a well-cared for pet? Write a short paragraph explaining how you would spend your days and what would make your dreams come true.

**Character Concepts:** Respect

We share our world with many creatures. We may not always understand the behavior of our fellow creatures but we must be considerate of their needs and feelings through our thoughts and actions.

**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 cats?

**Materials Needed:**

* DOWNLOAD Handout: “Cats – True or False?”

**Method:** Have you ever wondered why cats do the things they do? If you have a cat, you’ve probably been curious about them. Today we’re going to get some real answers to some of the questions children usually have about cats.

*Why do cats have whiskers?*

Whiskers are the long, thick hairs on a cat’s face. Whiskers, like hair and nails, do fall out and are replaced. You’ll notice that cats also have long “whisker-like” hairs on their cheeks, above their eyebrows, on their chin, and on the back of their front legs.

Whiskers really serve three purposes:

1. Whiskers help a cat feel his way around.
2. Whiskers help us know how a cat is feeling. When a cat is mad, he’ll pull his whiskers back. When a cat is happy, the whiskers will be relaxed and pushed forward.
3. But, whiskers are used most of all to help a cat know if he’ll fit through openings. A cat’s whiskers are about the width of his body – sort of a natural ruler. A cat will stick his head in and out of an opening before he puts his body in. If his whiskers don’t fit, the rest of him won’t either! So, don’t ever break your cat’s “ruler” by cutting or trimming his whiskers!

*Why do cats purr?*

Have you heard a cat purr? It sounds like a low, rattling hum. Cats show they are happy by purring. Humans smile and laugh, dogs wag their tails, and cats purr to show contentment. Sometimes cats also purr to help calm themselves if something upsets them (like a trip to the veterinarian).

How does a cat purr? Purring is a wonderful mystery. Some feline experts believe this sound is caused by vibrating muscles surrounding the larynx. Stimulation of a specific area in the cat’s brain causes cats to begin purring. Even if we’re not sure how cats purr, we humans are just glad they can. There is nothing more relaxing than snuggling up next to a purring feline friend!

*Why do cats sleep so much?*

Cats sleep an average of 16 hours a day, approximately 2/3’s of their life. They spend about twice as much time sleeping as most other mammals. The amount of time a cat sleeps can depend on age, health, weather, temperature, hunger, and sense of security. Experts are unsure why cats sleep so much. Wild cats live the same sort of life – long naps interrupted by searches for food. Domestic housecats apparently saw no reason to change this way of life. Some people believe their sleeping routine is related to the fact they like to be alone. They don’t read or watch TV, so they do the next best thing – they sleep! So snuggle in next to one the next time you want to take a catnap.

Cats are nocturnal (active at night rather than by day) and usually like to visit and play with their human family at night. This is the main time when kitty gets to see the family, who is finally home from work and school. Play with your cat a few minutes every night before going to bed so she won’t keep you up until the wee hours with silly antics!

*Why do cats “make biscuits” or knead?*

If your cat makes biscuits (pushes her paws in and out) on your arm, or kneads your belly, she is showing you how much she loves you. As a kitten, she moved her paws against her mother’s belly to stimulate the flow of warm milk. Most cats continue to knead throughout their lives, during times of absolute safety and contentment. You have taken the place of her mother as caretaker. Kneading is the nicest way for your cat to tell you how much she thinks of you.

*Why do cats spend so much time grooming?*

Cats are incredibly clean animals. For them, the saying “Cleanliness is next to godliness” is definitely true! Cats spend 1/3 of their waking hours grooming themselves. If a cat has licked you, you’ll know just how rough his tongue is. A cat’s tongue is covered by thousands of tiny “barbs.” These barbs allow kitty to groom himself, as well as lap water and lick up small pieces of food. Cats have a grooming routine that allows them to reach almost every part of their body with their tongue. Grooming keeps cats healthy. Cleaning with a barbed tongue removes loose hair and parasites like fleas; stimulates the skin to encourage the growth of new hair; and helps regulate her body temperature through the cooling action of saliva. When cats lick themselves, the tongue grabs a lot of loose hair that gets ingested. This can lead to nasty hairballs. You can help the grooming routine by brushing kitty regularly and giving hairball remedies.

What do you want to know about cats? Take the “Cat – True or False?” quiz to find out even more answers to the curious things cats do. The more you know about something the more you understand it! Learn all you can about your pets. You’ll be amazed!

**Call to Action:** Post a cat question outside your room each day for a week. Give all students in the school a chance to answer. Hang an envelope under the question to gather answers. Remind students to play “Cat Trivia” each day during the morning announcements. At the beginning of the next week, announce the winner of each question during morning announcements. This activity will help teach other students about cats.

Share your cat expertise with your family and friends! Take the **“Cat – True or False?”** quiz home. Give the quiz to family members. How many did they get right?

**Related Reading:**

*How the Cat Swallowed Thunder*, Lloyd Alexander, 2000 Dutton Children’s Books

A charming folktale about a woman (Mother Nature) and her cat that tells the story of why cats purr. The moral of the story is that honesty is the best policy.

*Why do Cats Meow?*, Joan Holub, 2001 Dali Books for Young Readers

Provides a wealth of information about the characteristics, behavior, and habits of cats and their interaction with humans. Ages 4-8.

*Why do Cats do That?*, Kim Thornton, 1997 Bowtie Press

Learn why cats go wild over catnip, hate getting wet, make biscuits, eat plants, scratch furniture, purr, and more.

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