PET OVERPOPULATION

LESSON 1: Grades 4-6

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

**Curriculum Connections, Standards addressed:**

**Academic Goals:** 1.6, 1.10, 2.1, 2.3, 3.1, 3.6, 3.7, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6 & 4.7

**Knowledge Goals:** Communication Arts: 1 & 6; Mathematics: 1; Science: 8

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

**Common Core-Aligned Activities:**

**W.5.7—Conduct short research projects to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.**

**SL.5.1c—Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.**

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 pets.

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

**ETS1.A—**Possible solutions to a problem are limited by available materials and resources (constraints). The success of a designed solution is determined by considering the desired features of a solution (criteria). Different proposals for solutions can be compared on the basis of how well each one meets the specified criteria for success or how well each takes the constraints into account. (3-5-ETS1-2)

**ETS1.B**—Research on a problem should be carried out before beginning to design a solution. Testing a solution involves investigating how well it performs under a range of likely conditions. (3-5-ETS1-2)

Pet overpopulation is a HUGE problem in the United States (actually, worldwide!) Pose the problem to students encouraging them to research solutions. What are the limitations? Available resources? Create a solution for your community and then tackle the problem on a larger scale.

**Materials:**

* Crayons
* Scissors
* Paper
* Magazine photos of animals (if desired)

**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 born are lucky enough to have loving, caring homes.

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 fight. 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---remember, there are not enough homes available for all the animals being born. 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 or being euthanized (humanely put to sleep.)

Next, explore these questions with your students:

* How can we be kind to animals?
* If every home had one dog and one cat, would all the cats and dogs being born have a home? Why or why not?
* What responsibilities do we have to domestic animals that we have made pets?
* What do animal shelters do? Why are they necessary?
* What would your community be like if there was no place for homeless, unwanted animals to go?

Create an animal “shelter” in your classroom by having students design the layout. What would they need? How many cages are “enough” for a community of your size? What problems might you encounter with space and size? How will you fund your animal shelter? Where will it be located? Will it be a place that people would like to visit? Who would work at the shelter? How would they be paid? What care do the animals need? Is it open seven days a week? Who will care for the animals during the night, on weekends and holidays? How many animals can your shelter care for? What happens when it is full?

Have each student cut out 20 pictures of dogs, cats or rabbits OR draw and color 20 such animals. These will represent a very small percentage of the actual number of animals in your community. Have the students choose two animals they will keep as pets. The remainder of the homeless animals will be placed in your animal shelter. Discuss with students the obstacles that these animals face. What is the uncertainty of the future of those that are not “chosen”? What responsibilities do we have to those that are unwanted? Do they deserve a home? Let the children explore options and situations, gently leading them to the realization that there are simply too many wonderful animals being born and not enough responsible homes available. What can be done to help these homeless animals? What options do they have? How can WE make a difference?

**Call To Action:** The above scenario is true in every community, city, state and country in the world. The reality is that too many animals are being born and not enough homes are available. Create your ANIMAL SHELTER as a model to display in the lobby or hallway of your school. Have students take turns monitoring the display to answer questions that students in other classes might have. Your students can take the model shelter to other classes, repeating the lesson so that all students in your school will be made aware of the pet overpopulation problem in your community.

**Attention Teacher**: See the following activity sheet “A Shelter Story”.

**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.