PET OVERPOPULATION

# LESSON 5: Grades 4-6

# 15 DOGS, 45 CATS AND YOU!

**Curriculum Connections, Standards addressed:**

**Academic Goals:** 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.10, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6, 3.8, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, & 4.7

**Knowledge Goals:** Communication Arts: 6; Mathematics: 1; Science: 8; Social Studies: 6; Health & Phys Ed: 3 & 5

**Objective:** Students will understand there is a very serious pet overpopulation problem in the United States with the results being too many dogs and cats and not enough homes. Students will learn the fate of many strays and will understand the term euthanasia. They will learn that the solution to pet overpopulation is spaying and neutering.

**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.**

**SL.5.5—Use displays in presentations to support main ideas or themes.**

Although animal shelters are safe places for animals and are staffed by caring people who provide for them, millions of animals that arrive at shelters around the world have to be **euthanized** (humanely put to death) simply because there are not enough homes for them. There are many countries that aren’t lucky enough to have many animal shelters. In those areas, stray animals walk the streets trying to scratch out an existence. Take a moment to allow the students to ask questions about euthanasia and write the term and definition on the board.

Validate their feelings of anger, sadness or disbelief but give them hope there is something they can do to stop this! They can stop pet overpopulation by having their pets spayed or neutered. This is a simple operation that prevents them from having puppies, kittens or bunnies. Males are neutered to prevent them from making females pregnant and females are spayed to prevent them from having babies (because their reproductive organs are removed.) This procedure is done under anesthesia so the animals feel no pain. They can also help by encouraging others to have their pets spayed and neutered as well.

**Character Concepts:** Responsibility

Being the guardian of another creature is very important. You hold their welfare in your hands. In the case of pet overpopulation, you also hold the welfare and fate of future generations of kittens, puppies or bunnies as a result of choosing NOT to spay or neuter. It is vitally important to make choices that enhance or build UP the welfare of animals by decreasing the number of homeless animals born into this world

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

**ESS.3.C—**Human activities in agriculture, industry, and everyday life have had major effects on the land, vegetation, streams, ocean, air, and even outer space. But individuals and communities are doing things to help protect Earth’s resources and environments. (5-ESS3-1)

**3-5-ETS1-1—**Define a simple design problem reflecting a need or a want that includes specified criteria for success and constraints on materials, time, or cost.

**3-5-ETS1-2—**Generate and compare multiple possible solutions to a problem based on how well each is likely to meet the criteria and constraints of the problem.

**5-PS1-4—**Cause and effect relationships are routinely identified, tested, and used to explain change.

**Materials Needed:**

* Large sheet of colored paper (from roll)
* Markers
* Pencils
* Glue stick
* DOWNLOAD Handout: “15 Dogs and 45 Cats”

**Method:** Introduce the lesson by playing the theme music Mission Impossible as students get seated and you are passing out the 15 Dogs and 45 Cats handout. Shut the music off and ask the students if they know there are 15 dogs and 45 cats for every person in the United States. Ask them if they think they could properly care for that many animals in their home? If they say yes remind them that each pet requires food, water, exercise, vaccinations, flea and tick prevention, heartworm prevention, leash, collar, tags, etc. Then ask them to think of how many people live in their home and remind them that each of those family members would have their *own* 15 dogs and 45 cats.

1. Have students turn their handouts over and write the number of people that live in their home at the top of the page and circle it.

1. Ask students to multiply 15 by the number of people in their home to get the number of dogs that would live with them.
2. Have students multiply 45 by the number of people in their home to get the number of cats that would live with them.
3. Add the solutions from these last two mathematical problems to get the total number of dogs and cats that each of your student’s households would have to care for if their family did their part to help every dog and cat find a home.
4. Then ask students to imagine what their home and their life would be like if they had the responsibility of caring for all of these animals?

Research the cost of caring for one dog or one cat for one year. How many pets would be living in your home as calculated above? What would the cost be? How much space does one pet need? How much of your time? What about vaccinations and veterinary care? Ask students to research the costs.

Explain this is a very serious problem called pet overpopulation and write the word on the chalkboard. Pet overpopulation means that there are too many dogs and cats and not enough homes. Ask them what they think happens to most of these animals. Only 250 of every 1,000 animals find a life-long home. The remaining 750 may find temporary care, food, shelter and water in an animal shelter or end up on our streets and highways as strays. Strays are homeless domestic animals that have no owners or a place to call home. Review the term DOMESTIC: animals that have been taken into homes as pets who no longer have survival instincts and depend on us to provide food, shelter, water and care. The lives of homeless stray animals is very difficult because many things can threaten their lives such as:

1. starvation
2. loneliness
3. vehicles (hit by car)
4. abuse by people
5. attacked by other animals
6. stolen and sold for research
7. disease

If you see a stray animal, call your local animal control officer and give them the location of the animal so they can find it. Many strays that are evaluated by shelters and animal control facilities are found to be healthy and are put up for adoption, so you can help the strays by seeking safety for them. Never approach a stray animal. If a stray approaches you, stand still like a tree, look straight ahead and never look the dog directly in the eyes. This is challenging them and basically telling them you want to fight. If a stray knocks you down, roll into a ball and cover your face. Please review the SAFETY WITH ANIMALS lessons regarding this.

**Call to Action:**  Make a class Pet Overpopulation Quilt to educate others about the problem. Have each student refer to their earlier equations. Give them an 8 x8 square piece of paper and have them draw that number of dog and cat heads on their square. Encourage them to make it colorful and write the total number of dogs and cats in their household at the bottom of the page.

Glue each students quilt square onto the large sheet of colored paper (don’t cut the paper until you have all of the quilt squares lined up. Then cut the paper so there is a border around the squares. Then take a marker and draw stitches on each quilt square so it looks like it was stitched. Hang your quilt in a high traffic area to educate others to spay and neuter their pets. Make a title above that says: Mrs. Jones’s students would have to have \_\_\_\_ dogs and cats in their homes if every dog and cat were to have a home! Stop Pet Overpopulation! Spay and Neuter your Pets!

Now, make a “HOPE” quilt by issuing a colored sheet of paper to each student. Ask students to write a plea from a homeless animal or a positive message about spaying and neutering. Use the same method and hang this quilt in a high visibility area as well.

**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.