SAFETY WITH ANIMALS

**LESSON 1: Grades K-3**

# LEARNING TO SPEAK “DOG”

**Curriculum Connections, Standards addressed:**

**Academic Goals:**  1.3, 1.5, 1.10, 2.1, 2.3, 3.2 & 4.7

**Knowledge Goals:**  Communication Arts: 1, 4, 5 & 6; Science: 3; Health & Phys Ed: 5

**Objective:**  To introduce students to the body language and sounds dogs use to express how they are feeling. Students will be able to recognize warning signs.

**Common Core-Aligned Activities:**

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

**SL.K-2.1—Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.**

If your dog could talk, what might he say to you? How do dogs communicate with you? With each other? Discuss the body language of the dogs portrayed in the “What is This Dog Telling You?’ handout. Do the students recognize the body language? What actions by PEOPLE can cause these responses in dogs? How should students respond?

**Character Concepts:** Respect, Fairness

**Respect:** Be aware of the behaviors your dog is exhibiting and what he is trying to ‘say’ to you. Give him the opportunity to succeed in good behavior by respecting his space and needs, i.e. when eating, sleeping, etc.

**Fairness:** Is it fair to assume that your dog should just respond with a happy tail wag if someone is hurting, frightening or threatening him? How can we expect our dogs to react to our behavior if it is harming them?

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

**2-LS4-1--**What animal in the wild most resembles dogs? How do they act? What threatens them in the wild? How does their habitat (living in the woods or forest) help them when they are fearful of danger? We have asked dogs to live with us in our homes. In sharing their lives with us, we sometimes assume dogs know what we expect. How can this be if we don’t know how to speak ‘dog’? What kind of observations can you make of dogs as pets that can be compared to a wolf in the wild? What is similar? What is different? What skills does a wolf have because he is wild that we have taken away from dogs? (i.e., a wolf can run from danger. Dogs are kept enclosed in homes, yards or worse, on a chain.)

**Materials Needed:**

* Writing utensils
* DOWNLOAD Handout: “What is This Dog Telling You?”

**Method:**  Ask students to act out several different emotions such as mad, sad, afraid, and glad. Have them do this using their bodies and faces only – no talking. Explain that dogs also use their bodies to express feelings. By observing dogs’ body language, we can usually tell when a dog is more likely to bite.

We can look at dogs’ mouths, eyes, ears, tails, and hair, as well as the way dogs stand to see what they are thinking or feeling. Distribute a copy of the “What is This Dog Telling You?” handout to each student. Look at each dog’s body language as a group, and discuss his body language. Then identify how that dog might be feeling. First illustration - ears are stiff, tail is high, teeth are showing. Did students guess this dog is mad? Second illustration - dog is afraid. Ears are low, tail is between legs, he is crouched down, teeth are showing. Third illustration - ears are up but relaxed, tail is low, mouth is open but relaxed. No teeth are showing. This dog is happy. Fourth illustration - dog is displaying a typical “play bow,” with head lowered, back end up in the air, tail wagging, ears up and relaxed. He’s playful.

Ask students which dogs are safe to pet. The correct answers are the happy and playful dogs in the third and fourth illustrations – but even then, only with the owner’s permission. Remind them to be cautious with dogs that are playful and excited. They may jump or bite if played with too roughly. Play only gentle games, like fetch. Don’t play tug of war, which can make dogs aggressive.

Stay away from dogs who are mad or afraid, because those dogs are more likely to bite. Explain to students that dogs also express themselves another way. Dogs “speak” using sounds, just as humans speak using words. By understanding the meaning behind each sound, we can usually tell when a dog is more likely to bite.

Ask students to imitate the sounds dogs make and discuss the meaning behind each sound. Begin with a bark. A bark can mean many things - an expression of loneliness or playfulness. It can signal that a dog needs to go out or serve to alert us. It’s often used to get our attention. A yelp almost always means “That hurt!” Dogs sometimes yelp when scared. A whine is a sound dogs use with humans to get something they want such as food, a treat, or attention. A growl is the most important sound to understand. This is a warning sign to let you know to stay away or a bite may follow. A dog is saying, “Back off!”

**Call to Action:** Have students pretend to be dogs who are mad, sad, happy, or afraid. Use body language only.Ask the students to observe pets at home, or a neighbor’s or friend’s pet, for expression of emotion. Have them draw a picture of the pet expressing the emotion they observed.

**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.