

"Companion Animals"

GRADES: 5-College

(modify for each age group)

TIME: 45-60 minutes

MINIMUM REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- **Video - *Kiss the Animals Goodbye* or *The Power of Compassion***
- **Photos of companion animals in happy and unhappy situations**
- **For young children: puppets of cat or dog**

Part One:

Kindness, Love, and Connection to Animals

A. Ask students to raise their hand if they have a companion animal at home. Find out how many have dogs, cats, rodents, birds, reptiles, or other species. Ask: "What do all these animals need?" List on the board (food/water, shelter, veterinary care, exercise and mobility, grooming, a clean cage if the animal is a caged, attention, LOVE). Ask students if there is ever a reason to hit or harm our animals to train or discipline them, and be prepared for the students to say "yes." Ask them: "Do mother cats hit or harm their kittens? Do mother dogs hit or harm their puppies? Do mother birds harm their babies? Do children need to be hit or harmed by their parents in order to learn?"

B. Guided Imagery: ask students to close their eyes and breathe deeply. Use the following or create your own version of a guided imagery:

"Imagine that you are a puppy. You sleep much of the day curled up with your mother and your sisters and broth-

ers, but when you are not sleeping you are playing with your littermates. When you are still very young, you are taken away from your mother and your littermates and brought to a new place where your playmates are people. For the first few days there are children and grown ups nearby all the time, playing with you and petting you, but after a few days, your people disappear for long periods of time leaving you alone. You've never been left alone before, and as a puppy it is not natural for you to be left alone. You cry, and scratch, and chew on everything you can. Finally your people come home, and you are so happy! You jump on them, and lick them, and wag your tail with joy. But then one of the people comes up to you with a chewed shoe and starts yelling at you and hitting you with the shoe. You are terrified and you cry out in pain when you are hit. You don't understand what you did wrong."



Ask students to open their eyes and to share how it felt to be a puppy. What could the people have done differently so that you wouldn't have been so unhappy, and so you wouldn't have been hurt?

Part Two: Overpopulation

A. What is an animal shelter? Ask students why animals are at shelters and humane societies, and what happens to them there. Explain “pet” overpopulation, and ask students what we can do to stop the killing of 10-15 million, or 9 out of 10 dogs and cats every year in shelters. Explain spaying and neutering. Explain the connection between buying purebred animals and the overpopulation of dogs and cats. Ask students how they feel about buying and selling other living beings. Share information about puppy mills, and the connection between pet shops and puppy mills. Provide photographs of puppy mill animals. If you have had experience working in a shelter, watching a healthy animal die for lack of a home, or knowing an animal who died because there aren't enough homes, share these stories with the students. Your personal stories about dogs and cats are important in order to help students connect to individuals (rather than some hard-to-comprehend number) who are killed because of overpopulation.

B. Activity: Presidential Commission

This activity should be done only after students have thoroughly understood the problem with overpopulation and the causes (breeding, purchasing purebred animals instead of adopting them from shelters, etc.). In this presidential commission divide students into two groups. One group believes that everyone should have the right to breed their dog or cat. The other group believes that licenses should be issued for breeding and that only a certain number of licenses should be available so that there are no surplus animals who would be killed due to a lack of homes. All others would be required to spay or neuter their animals. Have each group list the pros and cons of their perspective on the board. When the lists are

complete, have each student vote personally on the following question: “Should there be limited licenses available for breeding dogs and cats, and should all other dogs and cats be spayed or neutered?” When you are done, tally the votes and provide the name and address of the President (The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, DC, 20500) so that students may write with their opinion.

Part Three: Video

There are many videos on companion animals, from training videos, to films about overpopulation and euthanasia. *Kiss the Animals Goodbye* is a hard-hitting and very sad film about overpopulation which includes many scenes of euthanasia. It is also a pricey film, however, it makes a strong point and a permanent impression. It is available from Focus on Animals (see page 79).

Part Four: Closing Visualization

Ask students to close their eyes and imagine a companion animal whom they know. Tell them that this animal is suddenly able to speak to them if they ask questions. Have the students ask the animal the following questions: • How does it feel to be you? • What do you like people to do for you? • What don't you like that people do to you? • Is there anything that I do to you that you like or don't like? Have students open their eyes and turn to a student next to them. Each should take a turn sharing what they learned during the visualization. After they are done, ask if anyone wants to share with the whole class.

Part Five: Closing Suggestion

Ask students to think about what they can do to help companion animals. Suggest that the next time they see an animal, they stop, look into that animals' eyes and really think about how it feels to be that animal.