



Paws-ing to Reflect on Pets

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the United States today, it is pretty common to share our homes with four-legged (or feathered or finned) critters, but that was not always the case. A long time ago, animals such as cows and horses were **domesticated** to help humans do work. The wide variety of dog breeds we have now, from the tiny chihuahua to the huge great dane, are descendants of wolves, and were intentionally bred by people for certain desirable traits. (Watch [this video](#) to learn more about how we ended up with the variety of dog breeds we have today.) While some are still utilized primarily for hunting, herding, or guarding, dogs are embraced as part of the family in many areas of the US.

Most people who have pets would agree that sharing our lives with animals benefits us in countless ways. There are many things we can do to improve the lives of the pets in our homes and those of farm animals, as well as ways to help non-domesticated, or “wild”, animals.



RELATED HOLIDAYS THIS WEEK:

World Animal Day ~ October 4th

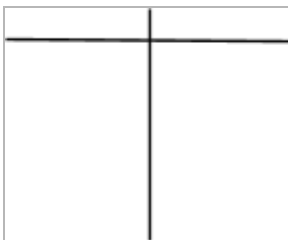
World Habitat Day ~ October 5th

LESSON/ACTIVITY 1: What Exactly is a “Wild” Animal?

You will need:

- ❖ Images of a variety of animals cut from magazines, newspapers, or printed from the internet (the sorting process could also happen with stuffed animals)
- ❖ Paper (such as construction paper)
- ❖ Marker

Instructions:



- 1) Make a T-chart on your paper so that the lines reach the edges of the paper (like the image to the left).
- 2) Write the term “Domesticated” on the left side, on top of the horizontal (or flat) line, and “Wild” on the right side of the vertical (up and down) line, above the horizontal one.
- 3) Sort your images into two piles or collages on either side of the vertical line, based on whether you think each picture shows an animal that is typically *domesticated* or one that is *wild* before moving on to step 4.

- 4) While domesticated animals have their needs provided for by humans, “wild” animals, or wildlife, are able to provide for themselves, or obtain what they need on their own. Sometimes, animals that were pets become wild, such as **feral** cats. A stray is an animal that was once a pet, but was abandoned or ran away. It might still be interested in living with humans. Animals that are or become feral (for example, if a stray cat has kittens that did not grow up around people) tend to be fearful of people and might not make a good pet. (Check out [this resource](#) if you want to learn more about the difference between strays and ferals.)
- Wild animals are pretty much *never* good pets, even if they’ve been tamed and sometimes interact with people, such as lions at the zoo. The domestication process typically takes multiple generations and selective breeding in order for animals of a wild species to become domesticated. Look back at your images (or stuffed animals); are there any that might belong in the other column? Are there any species which could fall in either category?
- 5) If you didn’t have any **aquatic** animals (such as frogs, dolphins, or fish) when sorting, think about which column they might fall into.

LESSON/ACTIVITY 1 EXTENSIONS

- A) **Comparing the Needs of People, Pets, and Wildlife:** What are the basic things that people, pets, and wildlife need? Make lists of 5-8 items for each and compare the lists - which needs do all living things share? Are there any needs that are not in every column? Are there any items on your list that are not actually essential for survival? (Think about which ones are “wants” and which are *necessities* - meaning the organism would die without them.)
- B) **Homes & Habitats:** Research the habitat of an animal you don’t know much about, perhaps a threatened or endangered species such as the Chinese Pangolin, Vaquita (type of porpoise), Sumatran Rhinoceros, Sea Otter, or Little Brown Bat. Where does this animal live? What does it eat? Why is its population threatened/endangered? How many are left in the wild? What can be done to help them? Draw/paint a picture, make a diorama, or write a report or story to show what you’ve learned. Share it with others!
- C) **Animal Communication:** Do you know what your dog, cat, or other pet is saying to you? Learn about the different ways that animals communicate with each other and with other species such as humans.

ACTIVITY 2: Testing Your Sniffer

Dogs have long been used during wartime to sniff out bombs and by law enforcement to find drugs. Their great sense of smell is being utilized in other ways as well; dogs sometimes act differently when people have diabetes or certain types of cancer, indicating that the dogs can detect the disease, likely by smell, sometimes before there are any noticeable symptoms. Dogs are now also being used to locate non-native invasive species! While you might not have as keen a sense of smell as a dog, you can still distinguish between many different smells. Have an adult help you set up the following experiment to see if you can determine what something is by smell alone.

You will need:

- ❖ Several (6-10) small cups/containers (such as clean bottle caps)
- ❖ A variety of spices/seasonings or foods such as:
 - Vanilla
 - Rosemary
 - Garlic clove/powder
 - Basil
 - Cucumber
 - Mint
 - Orange or orange juice
 - Hot cocoa mix

(Avoid foods your child is allergic to.)

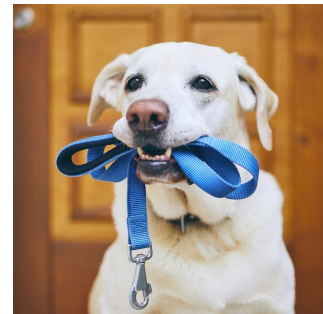


Setup/Instructions for Adults:

- 1) Place a small amount of each food/seasoning in small cups (a different one per container).
- 2) Don't allow your child to see what is in each cup, but you can make a list on paper to indicate what the options are/which foods. Share with them what scents to expect (but in a different order than you present them).
- 3) Have them do a "blind" smell test in which they close their eyes or are blindfolded and you hold a cup with a scent up to their nose. They can refer to the list and try to guess what it is that they're smelling.
- 4) For an added challenge, mix a couple of the ingredients together for a couple of the trials and see if your child can distinguish the different scents in the container.
- 5) **Follow Up Questions to Ask Your Child:**
 - a) Which scents were you able to pick out by smell?
 - b) When is our sense of smell impaired/weakened?
 - c) Why/in what scenarios is it important to distinguish between various scents? (You could prompt your child to think about when a smell might indicate something dangerous.)

Don't Forget Fido's Leash!

Did you know that in many public parks letting your dog roam off-leash is illegal? When dogs are allowed to wander they can get into fights with other dogs or people (even if your dog is friendly), and when they deposit waste (pee and poop) it can change the dynamic of the local ecosystem! When species that are typically **prey** of **canines** detect dog waste they may relocate to a different area thinking there are **predators** nearby.



Killer Instincts!

Often, cats that go outdoors hunt mice, birds, and other small animals - they might even bring these dead critters in to show you. This doesn't mean that they are wild or feral, or even that they're not getting enough food, but rather following their **instincts**. If possible, try to keep your pet cat indoors rather than letting him/her roam outside. It is estimated that BILLIONS of birds and rodents are killed by cats in the United States each year. That's a lot!

RECIPE: Peanut Butter, Banana, & Oat Dog Treats*

Ingredients:

- ❖ 1/2 Cup Natural Peanut Butter (*no added sugar/fillers*)
- ❖ 1 Ripe/Spotted Banana
- ❖ 1 & 1/2 Cups of Oats

Directions: Click [here](#) to see how to make them!

*Note: This recipe contains peanut butter, so if you or your child is allergic to nuts, please refrain from making them. You can find other dog treat recipes [here](#).





CRAFT: Dog & Cat Toys

A simple dog toy can be made by putting a plastic/recyclable water bottle in an old, tall sock, and tying the open end, or braiding strips of an old t-shirt (as shown to the left).

A catnip cat toy can be made by sewing two pieces of fabric together with a pinch of catnip inside (as explained below).



For the cat toy, you will need:

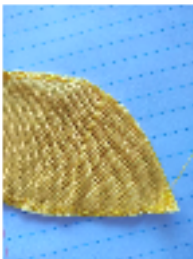
- ❖ Sewing needle (or sewing machine)
- ❖ Thread
- ❖ Scissors
- ❖ 2 Pieces of fabric (plus fluff/fabric scraps)
- ❖ Catnip
- ❖ Adult supervision/assistance

You can watch this [quick video](#), or follow the directions as follows...

Instructions:

- 1) Cut a length of thread that's a little longer than your outstretched arm.
- 2) Thread the needle and tie the two loose ends of the thread together in a double or triple knot.
- 3) Cut out two matching pieces of fabric into a square or fun shape.

(I used a patterned fabric and because I wanted to hide the stitches I'd made, I intentionally put the bolder/brighter design on the inside before sewing most of the way around and then flipped the fabric right-side-out before adding the catnip and fluff/fabric scraps.) →



- 4) Once you get most of the way around (whether or not you're planning to flip your fabric inside out) pause and add fluff or fabric scraps and catnip. Be careful that the needle doesn't end up *inside* the toy.
- 5) Continue sewing the rest of the way around and tie off the thread, then cut off the excess thread and return the needle to a safe location/container where your parent/guardian would like it kept.
- 6) Give your pets their new toys and watch them have fun! If you don't have a pet of your own, you can donate the toys you made to a local animal shelter!

Furred, Finned, Feathered: Other Critters You *Might* Have as Pets



There are certainly other animals besides cats and dogs that *may* be considered pets, although they typically require specialized care and habitats which can make it difficult to keep them in captivity and lack of knowledge about proper care often results in negative impacts on the animals themselves. If you're looking to purchase/adopt a less common or "exotic" species (or any type of pet that you've never had before), first make sure that it is not [illegal in your state](#). If the animal you're hoping to care for is permitted, you then need to research - *a lot* - to find out what the species needs to survive and thrive in captivity. In addition to food, water, and shelter, all creatures also need things to do - or enrichment. (I'm guessing you've felt bored once or twice when you've been cooped up without much to do - it's no fun!)

A Note about Not (Let Me Repeat, NOT) Keeping Wild Animals as Pets

There are also many species which should never be kept as pets in your home. Sure, crocodiles, tigers, and monkeys are cool, and cute when they're little, but they won't be happy spending their whole lives confined in a cage, and you won't be happy when they grow up and you realize you're in for more than you bargained for; non-domesticated, wild animals can be unpredictable and potentially dangerous. In addition, many wild animals that are being sold as "pets" or food are taken from areas where their natural numbers are already dwindling, causing further decline - sometimes to the point that the species is being listed as vulnerable, threatened, or endangered. For example, pangolins have been sold or traded illegally in such high numbers that they might go **extinct** in our lifetimes. (To learn more about these awesome creatures, click [here](#).)



RELATED WEBSITES & VIDEO

- ❖ Check out this website/video to learn more about animals → [National Geographic Kids](#)
- ❖ Saving Grace is an animal rescue/pet adoption center located in Winchester, Oregon. Click [here](#) to see what they're doing in Douglas County, and learn how you can help pets in the area.
- ❖ Watch the video [Cat Attacks = Death Sentence \(for birds\)](#) by Wildlife Images. Wildlife Images is an education and rehabilitation center in Grants Pass, Oregon. To learn more about the animals they care for (in addition to birds), or to schedule a visit, check out their [website](#).

VOCABULARY

Aquatic animals - animals that spend most or all of their lives in water

Canine - carnivorous (meat-eating) mammal in the Canidae family; often used as another word for dog

Domesticated - animals bred by humans for certain purposes and which depend on humans for food, shelter, and other things they need

Extinct - term used to refer to a species *no longer exists*/there are no organisms of the species alive (either in the wild or captivity)

Feline - carnivorous (meat-eating) mammal in the Felidae family; often used as another word for cat

Feral - animal living in the wild which was once, or is descended from animal which was once, domesticated

Habitat - area where an organism lives, and is able to find food, water, shelter and other necessities

Instinct - organism's natural/non-learned response to a stimulus or inclination to do a particular thing

Predator - organism that hunts or preys upon other animals

Prey - organism that that is hunted/eaten by other animals

