

Introduction

The purpose of this Teacher's Pack is to focus the attention of young children on the choice and care of their pets through a series of classroom discussions and activities. It is intended that teachers will select activities and discuss them with pupils, guiding them through the relevant sections. Notes on the activity sheets are in the text.

Although most pets are well looked after, many animals still find themselves unloved, unwanted or unmanageable. Even cats and dogs can be cruelly abused by heartless owners who may beat them, starve them, drown them or dump them by the roadside. A more common offence is simple neglect: for example, failing to clean out a pet rabbit regularly or forgetting to exercise the dog. Sometimes people neglect their pets without even realising it: for example, cages may be too small, the animal's diet is dull or there is a lack of interesting things to do.

The best defence against unwanted or neglected pets is to ensure that prospective owners have all the knowledge and understanding necessary to care for them. However, children cannot be expected to take on this task alone. It is the responsibility of parents and teachers to promote a responsible and caring approach to pet ownership.

Pets in history

800,000 years ago, at the dawn of human evolution, the ancestors of our domestic dogs (wolves, foxes and jackals) were already well established in the wild. No one knows how these wild animals became domesticated but it is likely that hunters, coming across wild pups on their hunting expeditions, gave them to their children to play with. Dogs seem naturally willing to follow humans and readily substitute a human leader in place of another dog. This does not mean that dogs think they are human beings. On the contrary, if given a chance, dogs will play together, reproduce or fight other dogs who try to come into their territory. There are over 400 breeds of dog, all descended from a few wild species.

In ancient Egypt, dogs and cats were worshipped as God figures and many were embalmed to preserve their bodies and their godly qualities. The pharaohs also kept larger animals, such as lions and antelopes, as pets. It was even the custom for fashionable Egyptian women to wear live snakes around their necks as a status symbol or as a piece of living jewellery.

The Romans used dogs to guard their homes and were also very fond of keeping exotic birds as pets. Some Roman noblemen even harnessed lions to their chariots instead of horses; however - whether we can call these animals 'pets' is a debatable point.

In mediaeval times cats, though kept as pets by many people, were associated with witchcraft and risked being hanged or burned at the stake with their unfortunate owners. Later, however, cats re-emerged as a favourite pet animal in the household.

Pets today

Many young children either have pets already or intend to get one. Indeed, a well chosen pet can bring immense richness and pleasure to the lives of young people. In 2001 there were about 6.1 million dog owners and 7.5 million cat owners in Britain. Other popular pets include rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, various birds, fish and ponies. An increasing number of people are also buying exotic pets, such as parrots, snakes, lizards, turtles and tortoises. However, these animals present additional problems for those

The main objective of this guide are to:

- ☞ engage the interest of young children.
- ☞ promote a greater awareness about the responsibility of pet ownership.
- ☞ promote kindness and understanding towards pet animals.
- ☞ improve the lives of pet animals.
- ☞ explore learning opportunities through the care and study of pets.
- ☞ place pet ownership into a wider context which encompasses the care of all living things.

You can also use a 'Pets' topic...

- ☞ as a means of addressing specific curriculum demands, a large part of KS1 "Life and Living Processes" can be taught through a pets-based project.
- ☞ to teach other topics and skills, e.g. counting in maths, artwork, discussion and reasoning skills etc.

(This does not mean you need to have a live animal in the classroom)

who are concerned about animal welfare since they may be wild-caught animals whose future in the wild is threatened by the pet trade. Exotic pets often require special food, housing and veterinary care.

The value of pets as an educational resource

Children are fascinated by animals and can relate to them on a variety of levels, for example, as real animals or as vehicles for telling a story. In addition, they (usually) have first-hand experience of at least one pet animal; if not their own, then a friend or neighbour's. Children are also keen to discuss the exploits of their own particular pets and, in so doing, provide an access point for learning where their interest and motivation levels are high.

There are many opportunities for study in the Science curriculum. See the appendices for a detailed list of examples.

Key Stage 1

Objectives from the POS

Examples

1. Scientific enquiry	
Knowledge, skills and understanding	
Observe, explore and ask questions:	Look at pet animals. Take a class vote on whether it is a good idea to keep pets (whatever the species). Vote again at the end of your study to see if opinions have changed. Why are pets different to wild animals? How do they differ from each other? Have a class discussion and brainstorm questions about pets. Write them down.
Work in groups:	In groups - find out who has pets in the class and make a simple chart to show this.
Evaluate:	Look at class results and discuss their method etc. Can they improve upon their method?
Use reference materials:	Internet, CD-ROMS, books etc.
Communicate their ideas using scientific language, charts, tables etc:	Ask the children to draw some animals. Make tables and charts to show lifespan, number and type of pets in the class. Ask them to write about pets and describe them verbally. Invite individuals to give a short talk. Write stories and poems.
Ideas and evidence in Science	
Collect evidence by making observations and measurements:	Discuss ways of measuring your pet (mass, height, length etc). Make a class table of results.
Investigative skills	
Planning and asking questions:	What questions need to be asked when planning a project? Each child plans a mini project, e.g. using photos, text, drawings and tables to describe their pet.
Using first hand experience to answer questions:	The children probably already have first hand experience of a pet animal. Plan some questions and invite a local speaker into the school to talk about their own pet animals. Study mini-beasts in the school grounds to compare pet animals with wild ones.
Communicate what happens in a variety of ways:	See above in knowledge, skills and understanding.
Use ICT:	Ask the children to write a short piece on the computer about their pets. Search a CD-ROM for information. Make a chart of the lifespan of different animals using the computer.
Consider evidence and evaluate Make simple comparisons:	From what the children have learnt some important questions can be answered, e.g. Are all pets the same size, mass etc? Are some pets better than others and, if so, why? Is it a good idea to keep pets? Are

	pets happy in captivity? Which pets should be avoided and why? -see section in booklet about exotic pets.
Compare what happened with what they expected to happen:	At the end of your project have a second class vote on whether all animals make good pets. How have opinions changed regarding which animals make a good pet?
Review their work and explain what they did to others:	Discuss as above. Plan and produce a class assembly where each child contributes a picture, text etc and also says something about the project, e.g. reciting a line of a class poem, naming animals studied etc.
2. Life processes and living things	
Life processes	
Understand the difference between things that are living and things that have never been alive: Discuss animal movement, feeding, growth, senses and reproduction: Relate life processes to animals found in their local environment:	Compare pet animals to fossils, plants, stones etc. and, through discussion, comparison and research define living and non-living. Pet animals offer easy access to all these functions. Compare two animals, draw them and note differences. Look at mice, wild birds, foxes etc. How do they compare with pet animals in these functions? E.g. wild mice can breed when they want to but must cope with climate, predation, and competition for food and mates.
Humans and other animals	
Compare the main external parts of humans and other animals:	Draw and label humans, fish, cats, snakes etc.
Note that humans and other animals need food and water:	
Taking exercise and eating the right types and amounts of food help humans to keep healthy:	Compare this with the needs of pet animals. Compare the needs (and food requirements) of a dog, rabbit and human. Examine and sort gerbil food. Make a pie chart to show the number and types of seeds in it. Compare your results to a human diet.
The role of drugs and medicines:	Pets need vaccinations etc. too!
How to treat animals with care and sensitivity:	Talk about the importance of caring for pets. Consider how we treat other things in the environment, e.g. woodlands and endangered species. Consider the trade in pet animals which are taken from the wild (see booklet).
Note that humans and other animals produce offspring	As in reproduction above.
Learn about senses that enable humans and other animals to be aware of the world around them:	List the senses in order of importance for humans. Now do the same for other pet animals. Dogs will have smell and hearing as their main senses. Gerbils will have sight and hearing, snakes- taste and rabbits hearing but what about earthworms?
Variation and classification	
Recognise similarities and differences between themselves and other animals: Treat animals with sensitivity: Group living things according to observable similarities and differences:	Discuss similarities and differences between humans and animals. Let groups compare different organisms and feed back to class, e.g. cat/dog, mouse/rabbit etc. Discuss care and sensitivity. Look for examples and opportunities where we can show sensitivity towards each other, our pets and wildlife generally. Discuss grouping animals with class and let children suggest groups, e.g. furry animals and non-furry animals or no legs, 4 legs, 6 legs, feathers, scales etc.

Living things in their environment	
Find out about the different types of plants and animals in the local environment:	Remember, all pet animals have ultimately come from the wild. But how do the wild animals differ from their pet cousins. This study could form another mini project. Discuss the topic and give each child a different animal to research. Feed back results to the class.
Identify similarities and differences between local environments and ways in which these affect the animals and plants that are found there:	Local areas may include ponds, woods, hedgerows, streams, meadows or a wild patch. Discuss similarities and differences between these areas, e.g. are they wet/dry, shady/sunny, tall plants/short plants, lots of animals/few animals etc. Are there specific animals which inhabit certain areas, e.g. fish in the pond and butterflies in the wild patch? What features allow them to live there? Look at the information on gerbils in the booklet. How would living in a desert compare with living in an English meadow?
Caring for the environment:	This is an extension of the concepts learnt about caring for your pet and yet another opportunity for a mini project and some individual research. What bad things do people do to their environment, e.g. drop litter, pollute, cut down trees etc? What can we do to help our environment?
3. Breadth of study	
Most aspects of the breadth of study criteria have been covered in this project including appropriate context, using a range of sources, using first hand and secondary data and using a variety of communication skills:	Caring is a concept we should apply to ourselves, other people, our pets and our planet

National Curriculum Web Link: www.nc.uk.net/nc/contents/Sc-1-1-POS.html