

**Purpose:** To help children think through the needs of a particular species, using the gerbil as an example.

# My pet gerbil

## An example of a pet animal

There are about 50 species of gerbil, commonly known as jerboas, jirds or desert rats. However, those that are sold in pet shops are all descended from Mongolian gerbils that were trapped in Eastern Mongolia in 1935.

Gerbils are small rodents, well adapted to life in the desert - their natural habitat. They need little water, obtaining enough moisture from their diet of plant vegetation and seeds. They avoid the heat of the day by burrowing and come out in the cool of the evening to feed. Gerbils have many predators, such as snakes and hawks. Consequently, when out in the open they are constantly on the look-out for danger.

In captivity, gerbils are active, inquisitive creatures which readily adapt to humans. They require relatively little space and do not smell. They can also be left for a few days as long as adequate food and water is provided. If cared for properly, gerbils make good pets, and they hardly ever bite if handled correctly. They like company but may fight, so to avoid unwanted battles – and unwanted babies! – it is best to keep two or three members of the same sex together. If someone decides to keep gerbils, they should ensure that they buy young animals to minimise fighting while the gerbils settle down together.

### Requirements

- Large glass tank with metal grille for ventilation.
- A quiet position away from direct sunlight.
- Clean, coarse sawdust for burrowing in.
- Paper, hay, etc., for nest material.
- Cardboard tubes to hide in.
- Wood to gnaw on to help keep their teeth short (gerbils, like all rodents, have continually growing teeth).
- Food, e.g. oats, shop-bought ready mixed food, currants, apple, carrot, fresh water.

The prospective owner should also buy a book about caring for their pet and discuss it with their parents.

### How long will my pet live for?

Gerbils live for about three years, which is ideal for children. Although they will be sad when their pet dies, the children can always replace their gerbil. Children may become bored with animals with longer life spans, e.g. snakes and terrapins.

## Sheet 4: My pet gerbil needs...?

Discuss the needs of a pet gerbil. These are summarised in the ‘Requirements’ box above.

Invite the children to colour in the title on the first page of the activity sheet, and the picture on the second. Then let them use different coloured pens to join the gerbil to his food, cardboard tube and water bottle.

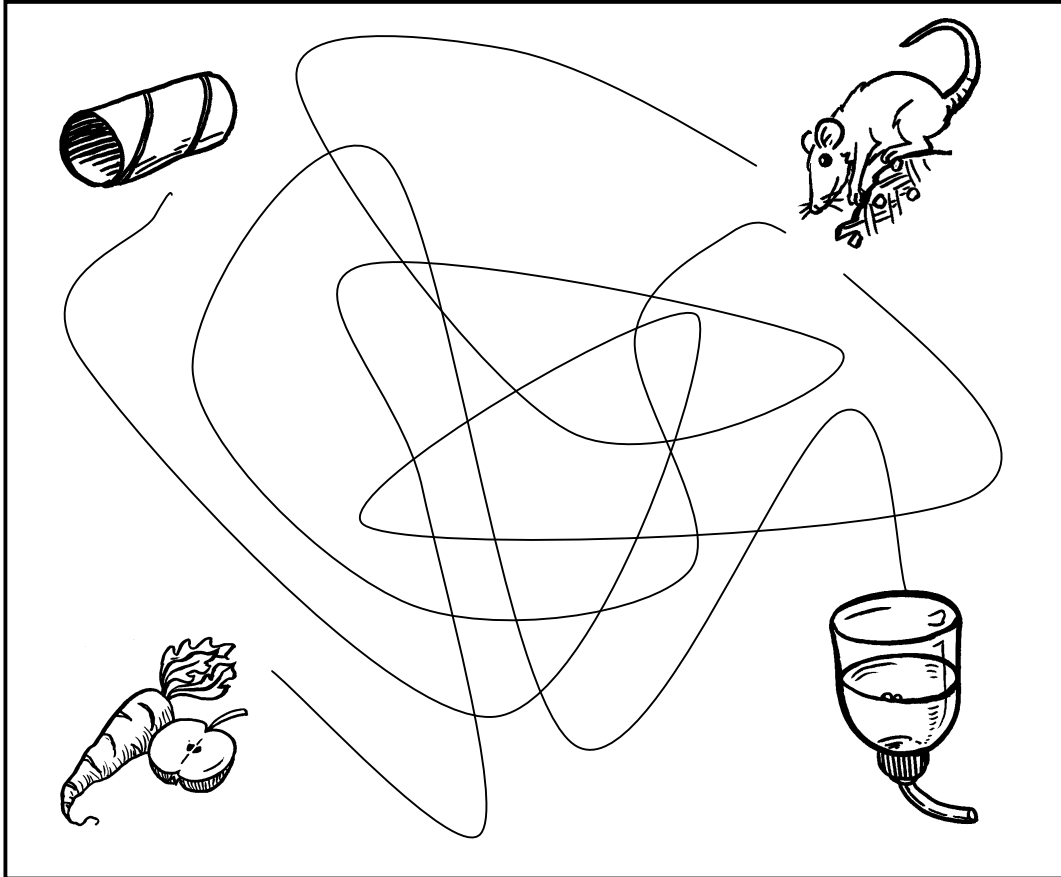
Look at the table on the first page and discuss the meaning of each picture. Then ask the children to tick or shade in the pictures that refer to gerbils’ needs, i.e. a gerbil needs food, water, a home, friends, card/wood (to chew on or hide in), a nest and burrowing material. Ask the children to add two more gerbils to the picture on the second page.









Deserts and desert animals could make a fascinating mini-project, adding an important geographical dimension to your study of pets.

## Sheet 5: Caring for your pet

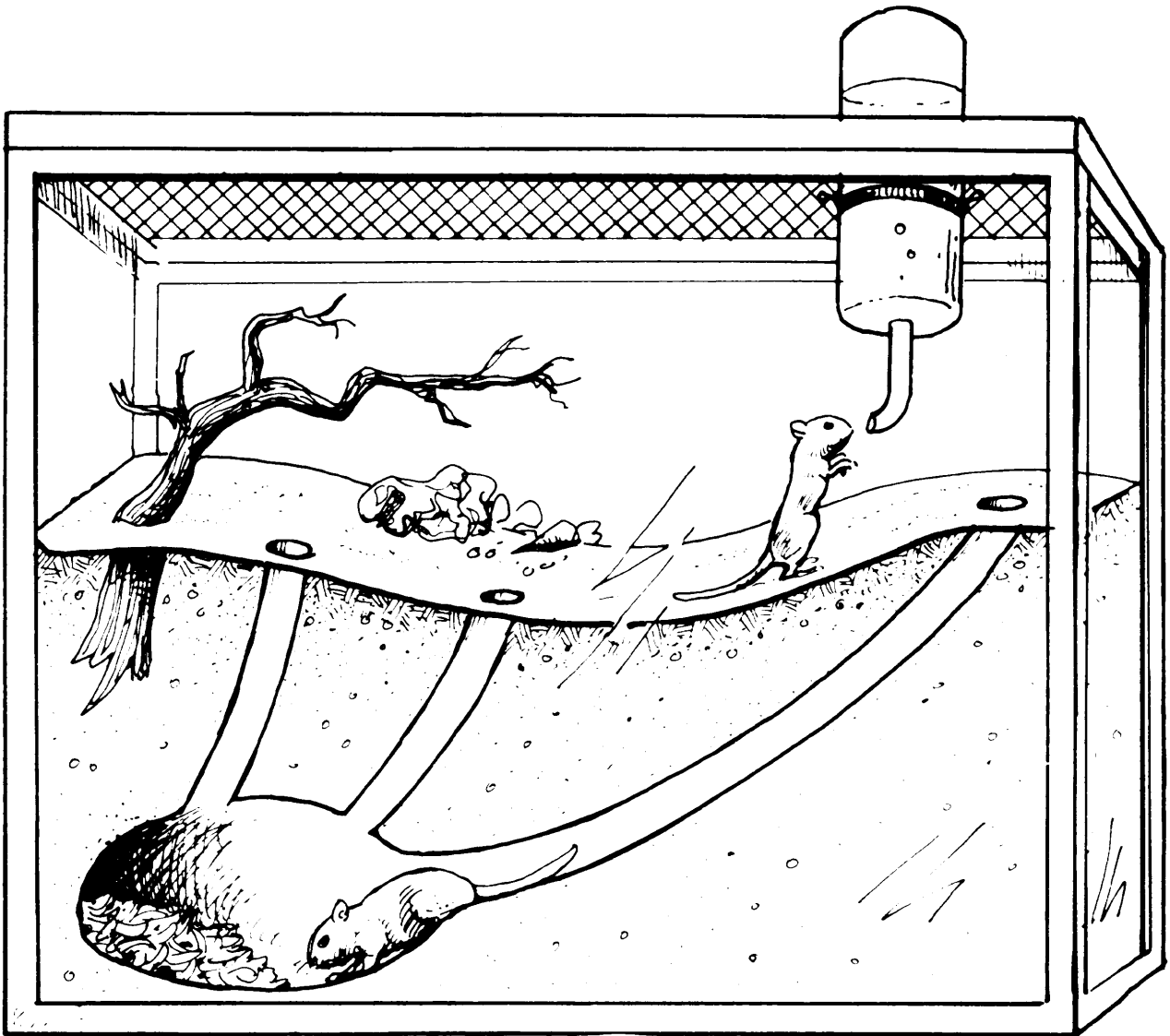
Give the children crayons and ask them to shade each shape on the second page a different colour. Discuss the words and talk about how we label diagrams. Ask the children to cut out the shapes on the second page, match them to the correct shapes on the first page and then stick them in place.

# My pet gerbil needs?

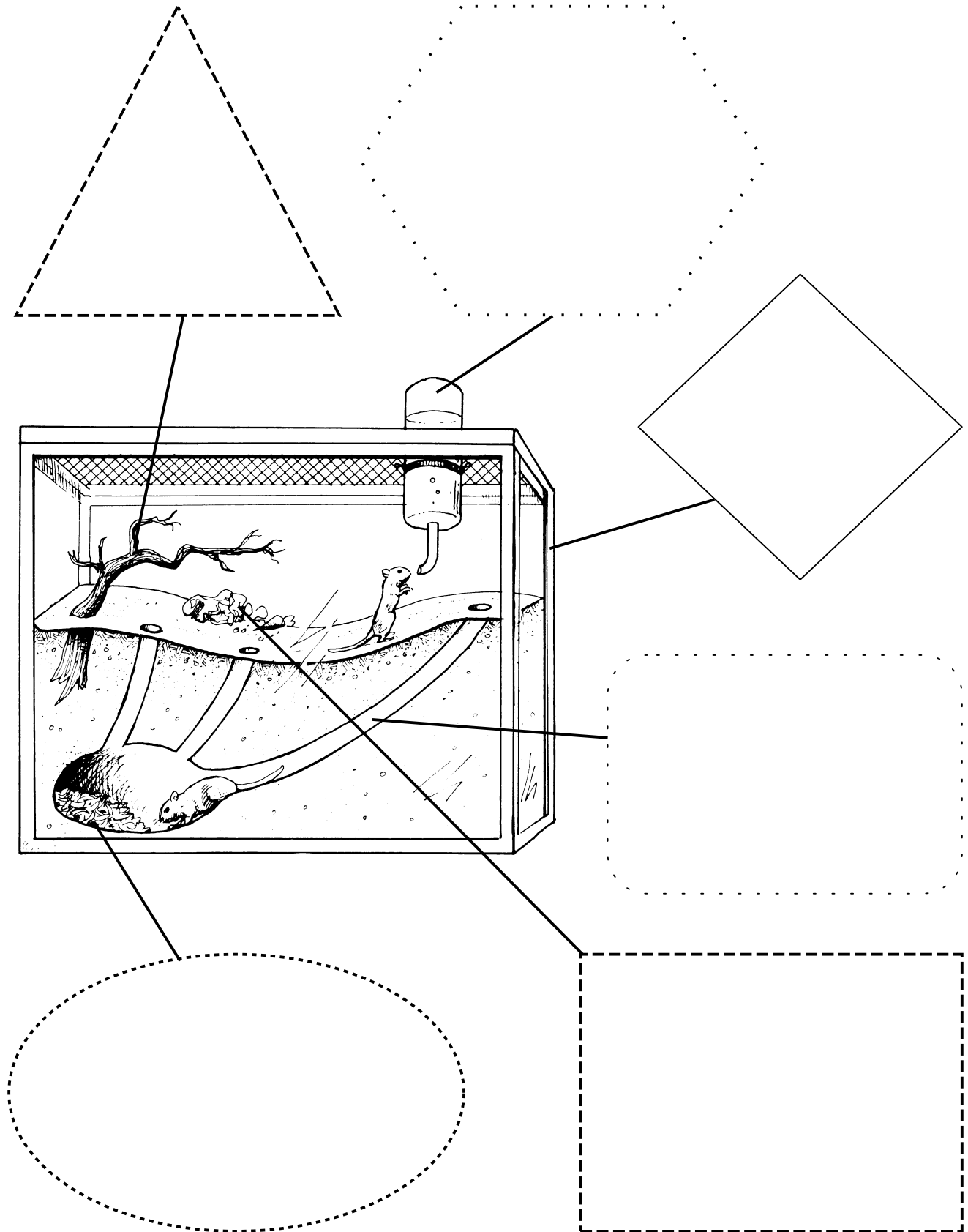


|   |   |   |  |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|---|--|
| <br><b>Brush</b> | <br><b>Burrowing</b> | <br><b>Food</b>  | <br><b>Walking</b> | <br><b>Card</b>    | <br><b>Garden</b> |
| <br><b>Home</b>  | <br><b>Nest</b>      | <br><b>Toys</b> | <br><b>Water</b>  | <br><b>Friends</b> |  |

# A home for gerbils



# Caring for your pet



# Caring for your pet

