

Explorers Preschool Curriculum

Let's Explore Pets



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Thank you to the following colleagues who supported the development of Explorers Preschool Curriculum.

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Let's Explore: Pets

Pets are members of many families and school communities, and many young children are inherently interested in pets. During the preschool years, children come to understand that pets aren't playthings; they are living creatures that need our care and attention.

This topic might be a fit for you if...

- "Puppies and kittens" or other pet-related themes frequently surface in children's imaginative play.
- Children seem to be curious and filled with questions about pets.
- Your group has recently added a classroom pet or will add one soon. Or, your group will have access to other pets that children can safely observe.

Let's Talk About Pets

Use words like these during everyday conversations with children.

aquarium
bedding
collar
enclosure
groomer
leash
shelter
veterinarian
vivarium

Specific names of pets and their young: cat/kitten, guinea pig/pup, parakeet/hatchling, and so on.

Names of pet features: fur, fins, paws, muzzle, feathers, scales, tail, and so on.

Words to describe animal actions: bark, burrow, scratch, tunnel, gnaw, purr, and so on.



Pets Collectibles

Collect some of these interesting objects to investigate with children. Families can help! All pet-related items should be cleaned and sanitized if needed before sharing with children.

leashes, harnesses, and collars
pet beds and houses
pet bowls and water bottles
pet toys
photos of family pets, teacher pets

Preparing to Explore Pets

Is this topic truly a fit for your group?

Pets can be an appealing topic for many reasons. Many children are intrigued by pets, and many educators are eager to share pet-related experiences with children. However, there may be some reasons to avoid *Pets* as a primary topic of study. Here are some things to consider.

Some people feel uncomfortable about certain pets.

Survey families about their feelings about pets. Some cultures and religions have beliefs about whether pets belong indoors and about whether children should handle pets.

Some people are allergic to pets.

Check with families about children's allergies and the allergies of others in the child's home.

Some children and families have had frightening experiences with pets.

Ask about whether children have any intense fears about particular pets. Some families may have concerns about safety around some kinds of pets, too.

The loss of a pet is painful for children and families.

Invite families to share if they have recently experienced a loss, such as a pet's death or having to rehome a pet due to a family emergency. An intensive pet topic could be difficult for children who miss their beloved pet.

Some families don't want any pets.

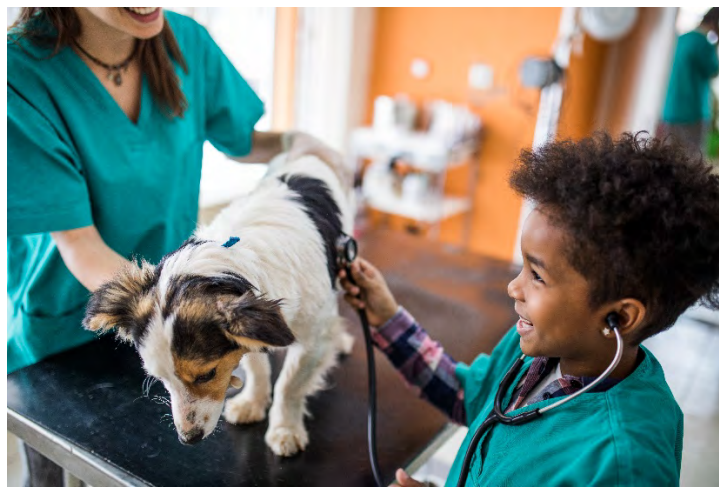
Families may worry that the topic will inspire their child to begin asking for a pet at home. Some experiences, such as bringing in photos of family pets, could also make some children feel left out. Create opportunities for families to share their questions and concerns.

Use what you know about children and families to guide your planning. You might choose another topic entirely, or you might wish to focus on the pets that feel most appropriate to your group. For example, *fish and aquariums* might spark vibrant investigation that includes a child who is allergic to or afraid of larger animals.

If you feel that the *Pets* topic is truly a fit for your group, use the following page to continue planning.

Preparing to Explore Pets, cont.

1. With your teaching team, think about and discuss the following questions.
 - What experiences have our children had with pets? What background knowledge do they most likely have?
 - What resources could be helpful as we explore this topic with children? As we learn about pets, are there any special places we might go to or special people who might visit our classroom?
 - What are some things that children might learn and do as we explore pets? What new words or concepts could they begin to understand?
2. Let families know the group is going forward with a pet investigation. Think together about ways that families can be involved. For example, families may be willing to share photos of their pets or even bring a safe pet for a visit. Or, a parent or grandparent might be a veterinarian, dog groomer, volunteer at a pet rescue, or other pet-related professional.
3. Gather books and materials to add to learning centers and to use during small group experiences. You'll find suggestions on the pages that follow.



Learning Center Extensions – Pets

Here are some examples of materials that could be added over time for daily free play.

For more information on incorporating materials into your classroom, see the *Learning Everywhere* section in the Getting Started packet.

Table Toy/Fine Motor Area

- Pet puzzles and games
- Small pet figures with table blocks and/or sorting trays
- Dollhouse with people, furniture, and pets

Dramatic Play Area

- Soft toy cats and dogs with care props such as brushes and bowls
- After being introduced to children, materials from the **Imaginative Pet Play** small group learning experience(s) will be added to this area

Small Worlds Play Area

A large, shallow storage tote with props is perfect for imaginative play on the floor or table. Here are some possibilities.

- Tortoise Terrarium with toy turtles, gravel, larger rocks or logs for climbing on, food bowl, felt or paper lettuce, and cardboard box hideout house
- Hermit Crab Habitat with sand, shells, driftwood, natural sponge, and hideout
- Mouse Enclosure with bedding, cat toy mice, soft nesting material, exercise wheel, empty water bottle, food bowls, cardboard tubes
- Dog Park with toy dogs, Duplo people or other small characters, blocks and other materials for building park fences and features, pom poms or small toy balls

Block Area

- Toy pets for block structure homes
- Loose parts such as river rocks, cardboard tubes, silk plant leaves, and tree branch slices to add to animal home structures

Learning Center Extensions – Pets

Science Area

- Small pets that are visiting the classroom such as:
 - Hermit crabs
 - Gecko
 - Hamster
 - Parakeet
- Close-up photos of pets
- Stethoscope, animal x-rays, and needle-less large syringe when children are interested in veterinarians
- Pet care guides for animals in your classroom, such as those in the *Pets' Guides* series by Isabel Thomas and Anita Ganeri
- Factual books about pets, such as:
 - The Dog Encyclopedia for Kids*, Tammy Gagne, Capstone, 2017
 - The Everything Book of Dogs and Puppies*, DK, Candlewick, 2018
 - Little Kids' First Big Book of Pets*, National Geographic, 2019

Art Area

- Pet-related catalogs, calendars, and magazines for collage
- Pawprint stamps or stickers
- Easel paint in pet-inspired colors - such as black, white, gray, orange, and brown when children are interested in cats or dogs

Water Play Area

- Water with clean aquarium gravel and plants, nets, scoops, and sieves

Sand Play Area

- Clean corn cob pet bedding or another low-dust pet bedding that children can scoop and pour
- Scoops, cups, tubes, funnels, and containers to fill and empty

Book Area

Add some of these books and/or your favorite books about pets.

Best Day Ever, Marilyn Singer and Leah Hixon, Clarion Books, 2021

Big Cat, Little Cat, Elisha Cooper, Roaring Brook Press, 2017

Can I Be Your Dog?, Troy Cummings, Random House, 2018 *

Cat Dog Dog, Nelly Buchet and Andrea Zuill, Schwartz and Wade, 2020

Charlie Chooses, Lou Peacock and Nicola Slater, Nosy Crow Books, 2021 *

Fish Eyes: A Book You Can Count On, Lois Ehlert, HMH Books for Young Readers, 2001

Hamsters Make Terrible Roommates, Cheryl Klein and Abhi Alwar, Dial Books, 2021

I am a Cat, Galia Bernstein, Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2018 *

I Do Not Like Al's Hat, Erin McGill, Greenwillow Books, 2017 *

Kitten and the Night Watchman, John Sullivan and Taeun Yoo, Simon & Schuster, 2020 *

Lola Gets a Cat, Anna McQuinn and Rosalind Beardshaw, Charlesbridge, 2018

Mango, Abuela, and Me, Meg Medina and Angela Dominguez, Candlewick, 2017

Mr. Scruff, Simon James, Candlewick, 2019 *

Pet This Book, Jessica Young and Daniel Wiseman, Bloomsbury, 2018 *

Some Pets, Angela DiTerlizzi and Brendan Wenzel, Beach Lane Books, 2016 *

Stormy, Guojing, Schwartz & Wade, 2019

Truman, Jean Reidy and Lucy Ruth Cummins, Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2019 *

***Denotes a recommended read-aloud to share with groups of children.**

Talking About Books

As you share books with individuals, small groups, or larger groups of children, ask questions like these:

- **Beginning:** The words on the cover tell us the title - (read title.) What do you predict that this book will be about?
- **Middle:** What do you think might happen next?
- **End:** Did this book remind you of any other books that we have read?

Conversations about Pets

Use prompts such as those in this section as you talk with children throughout the day. For more information on incorporating planned conversations into your daily schedule, see the *Learning Every Day* section at the beginning of this book.

Pets Conversations


daily - during meals, play times, transitions, or group times

Try asking one or two questions like these when you have opportunities to talk with individuals, small groups, or the larger group of children.

- Do you have any pets at home?
- What is your favorite thing about your pet?
- What do you notice about our class pet?
- What are some ways that people take care of pets?
- Have you ever met an unusual pet?
- What are some things we know about [a particular kind of pet, such as goldfish]?
- How did your pet get its name?
- How are cats different from dogs?
- What do you feed your pet? Does your pet have a favorite food?
- If you could have any animal for a pet, what would you pick? Why?
- How are pets different from wild animals?
- Would an elephant make a good pet? Why or why not? (Repeat with other animals.)

At least once a week, make a chart to write down children's answers to a question. Talk with children one, two, or a few at a time to collect responses.

Later, read the written responses back to the group. Post the chart where children and families can view it.

What do we know about parakeets? 

Sometimes parakeets are called "budgies" - Ajay
They can be green or blue. - Jervae
It is really funny when they bob up and down. - Doriovan
They eat bird seed. - Xander
They play in their water and make a mess sometimes. - Ava C.
There are some parakeets for sale at Pet Paradise. - Ben
They make different noises. - Bella
They need to live inside where it is warm. - Ava W.
Sometimes their seed gets on the floor. We sweep it up. - Grace
Parakeets love mirrors! - Eli
Their toes wrap around their perch. They hold on tight. - Kaylin


Conversations About Pets

Pet Polls

1-3 times per week – at arrival or group time

Choose a question from the list below or create one of your own. Make a chart with the question and two possible responses, using picture cues when possible. Invite children to write their names or place name cards to respond.

- Would you rather have a big dog or a small dog?
- Do you have a cat at your house?
- Which pet book should we read today? [two choices]
- Would you rather have a noisy pet? Or a quiet pet?
- Have you ever met a parrot?
- If you were a pet, would you rather be furry? Or scaly?
- Can you make a sound like our guinea pig?

What shall we name our  ?	
Yoshi	Dotty

Sharing Our Experiences So Far

several times a week - during meals or play times

As you talk with individuals and small groups of children, tell about your own positive experiences with pets. For example, you might recall a dog you had as a child or tell funny stories about a new kitten that your family has adopted.

Listen attentively as children tell about their experiences, too. Help children make connections between shared experiences. (“It sounds like you and Aiden both have aquariums at home. I wonder if you have the same kind of fish?”)

Songs, Rhymes, and Games about Pets

These playful songs, rhymes, and games can be incorporated into group times and transition times.

Our Friend Has a Pet - *to the tune of Old McDonald*

Invite each child to name an imaginary pet as you sing this song.

Our friend [child's name] has a pet, E-I-E-I-O,
And [child's name's] pet, he/she is a [specific animal], E-I-E-I-O.
With a [sound or action] here and a [sound or action] there,
Our friend [child's name] has a pet, E-I-E-I-O!

Example

Our friend Keisha has a pet, E-I-E-I-O,
And Keisha's pet, she is a cat, E-I-E-I-O.
With a purr-purr here and a purr-purr there,
Here a purr, there a purr, everywhere a purr-purr,
Our friend Keisha has a pet, E-I-E-I-O!

Mouse House

Before you play, make five simple houses out of construction paper. These can be different colors, or they can be marked with shapes or numbers. You'll also need a little paper mouse to hide. Begin by arranging the houses in a row, hiding the mouse under one of the houses.

Invite a child to guess where the mouse is by naming a color, shape, or number.

The group chants:

Little mouse, little mouse,
Are you in the _____ house?

Lift the house to see if the mouse is there. Continue choosing and chanting until the mouse is found. Then, children can cover their eyes while you hide the mouse again. Once children are familiar with this simple game, make the materials accessible for children to use during playtimes.

More Traditional Songs About Pets

Fiddle - I - Fee

How Much is that Doggy in the Window?

BINGO

Songs, Rhymes, and Games about Pets

I Had a Little Turtle - *traditional action rhyme*

I had a little turtle. (cup hands as if holding turtle)
He lived in a box. (draw a square with fingers)
He swam in the water, (move hands as if swimming)
He climbed on the rocks. (move hands as if climbing)

He snapped at a mosquito. (clap loudly each time you say the word “snapped”)
He snapped at a flea.
He snapped at a minnow,
And he snapped at me!

He caught the mosquito, (clap loudly each time you say the word “caught”)
He caught the flea,
He caught the minnow,
But he didn’t catch me! (point thumb to self and shake head “no”)

Five Little Kittens - *traditional fingerplay*

Five little kittens, standing in a row. (Hold up five fingers, palm facing out.)
They bow their heads to the children so. (Bend and straighten fingers)

They run to the left, (Wiggle fingers, moving hand and extending arm to your left)
And they run to the right. (Repeat, moving hand to your right)
They stretch up tall with all their might! (Open fingers wide)

Along comes a dog, (Make a loose fist with your other hand, extending thumb for head)
Looking for some fun. (Hop “dog” toward “kittens”)
Meow! Meow! Away the kittens run! (Hide hand behind back)



Pets Playlist

The Bunny Hop - traditional
Diez Pajaritos (10 Little Birds) - 1, 2, 3 Andres
My Dog Has Fleas - Ella Jenkins
Rags - Jack Hartmann
When Cats Get Up in the Morning – The Kiboomers

Small Group Learning Experiences – Pets

Share learning experiences such as those on the following pages with small groups of children each day. Groups should usually consist of three to seven children, rather than the whole group at once. Small group experiences may occur as children choose to join a teacher during free play time or during a separately scheduled small group time.

Consider these questions as you choose daily learning experiences.

- **Which pets are children most curious about?**
You and your group of children might opt to “zoom in” to focus on something more specific, such as dogs, small pets, or reptiles as pets. Choose and adapt learning experiences to suit your interests.
- **What are our learning goals for individual children and for the group as a whole?** Choose experiences that support specific objectives for learning. Strive to create well-rounded plans that support all domains of development.
- **How can we extend children’s thinking and learning?**
Choose activities that can be connected to children’s experiences so far. Remember that it is often appropriate to rerun planned experiences. Offering an experience two or more times over a few days or weeks invites children to gain expertise and deepen their understanding.



Pair planned learning experiences with ample opportunities for open-ended free choice exploration in the classroom and outdoors.

Pet Survey

Let's find out about our classmates' pets.

Materials

- Clipboard with pencil/marker for each child in the small group
- Survey sheet from this curriculum or survey sheet of your own
- Scissors and tape or glue stick if using the clip art from this curriculum

Explain to children that you are curious about the pets children have at home. What do they wonder about classmates' pets at home? If you wanted to find out about which pets people have at home, what could you do?

Invite each child or pair of children to choose a specific pet, such as a cat, dog, pet fish, pet bird, pet snake, or hamster. You may use the survey sheet and clip art on the following pages or make simple survey sheets of your own. Which pet do children predict will be most common? Which pets do they predict will be uncommon?

Model asking a child, "Do you have a [specific pet] at home? Demonstrate how to make a tally mark in the "yes" or "no" column to reflect the child's answer. Invite each child in the small group to ask their question to you or another small group member.

Decide together about who else you will survey and how. For example, children could walk around the classroom to survey peers who are playing, or the small group could walk through the building to survey various adults. Older groups might even visit another classroom to conduct a survey.

This should be a relaxed, informal experience. Watch children for cues that they are engaged and conclude the activity if they seem to be losing interest.

After the small group members complete their surveys, count tally marks in each column and write numerals at the bottom of the page. Which pet was most common? Which was least common? Does this match children's predictions?

Helpful Hints

Preschoolers are often unreliable survey participants. As surveyors, they sometimes ask the same person more than once or make stray tally marks on their page. As survey responders, they sometimes respond imaginatively rather than factually. That's OK! This experience is more about the positive experience of asking questions and listening to others than about accurate data.

Pet Survey (cont.)

Including Every Explorer

This experience may be challenging for children who feel shy or have limited communication skills. It may be helpful to have children work as partners or invite a child to be your partner.

Adapt the survey sheets to suit the ages and abilities of the group. Younger children may have an easier time with a survey sheet where they only record “yes” responses. Or, red and green dots can provide visual cues for “yes” and “no.” Children with limited use of hands might use a BINGO dauber to mark their survey.

Did You Know?

Some educators may wonder whether a survey sheet is a worksheet. Typically, a worksheet is a stand-alone task intended to check a child’s knowledge about something. Worksheets are often completed at a table or desk and are not a valuable learning experience for preschoolers.

A survey sheet is intended to be used by each child as they move around to interact with others, collecting answers to their chosen question. Thus, a survey sheet is considered a tool for investigation rather than a worksheet. As with all Explorers experiences, children are invited but not required to participate.

More to Do (optional)

- The clip art pets are simple silhouettes. What clues about an animal do you notice when you can only see the shadow or silhouette? Use a lamp or other light source to experiment with making shadows using toy animals. The pet clip art can also be enlarged and laminated to create shadow puppets. Older preschoolers may even want to trace pet silhouettes on paper taped to the wall or floor.
- Find an engaging way to share your survey results about the most and least common pets with families and others.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Social and Emotional Development - SE 1.2, SE 3.2

Language Development – LD 1.2, LD 2.1, LD 3.1

Mathematical Thinking - MT 1.1, MT 2.1

Social Studies - SS 1.1

Do you have a

at



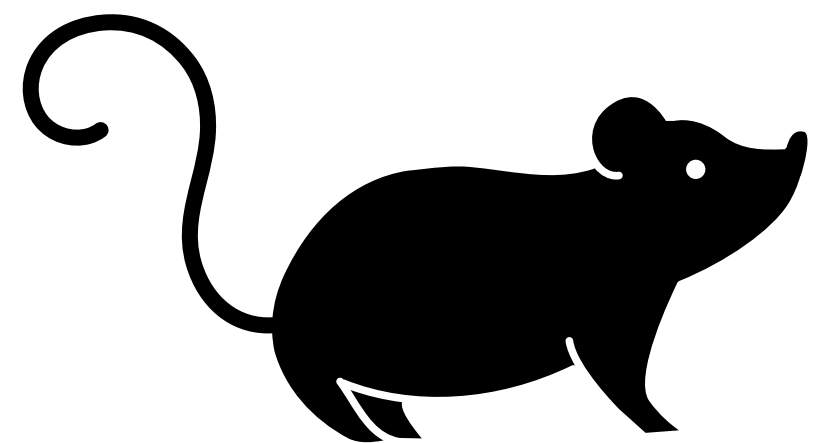
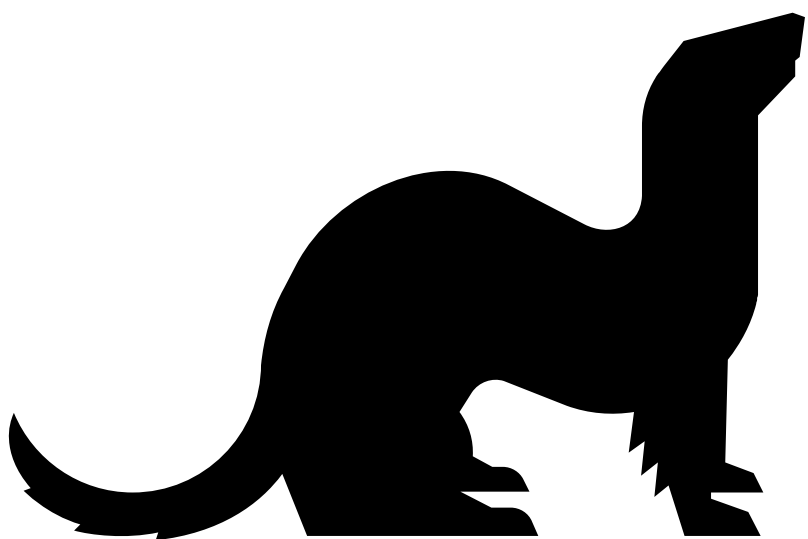
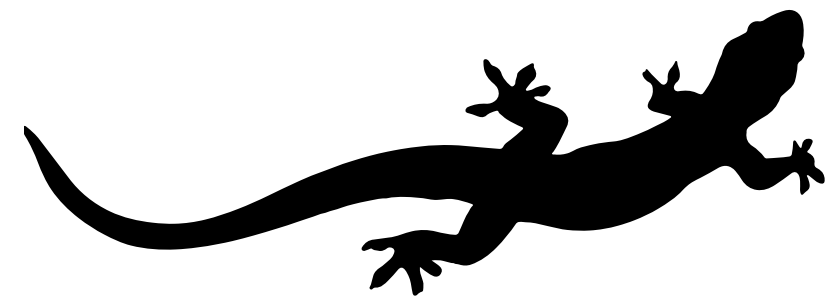
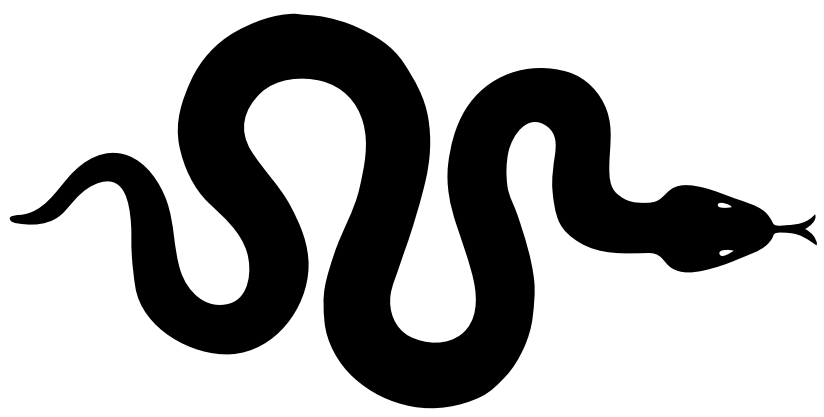
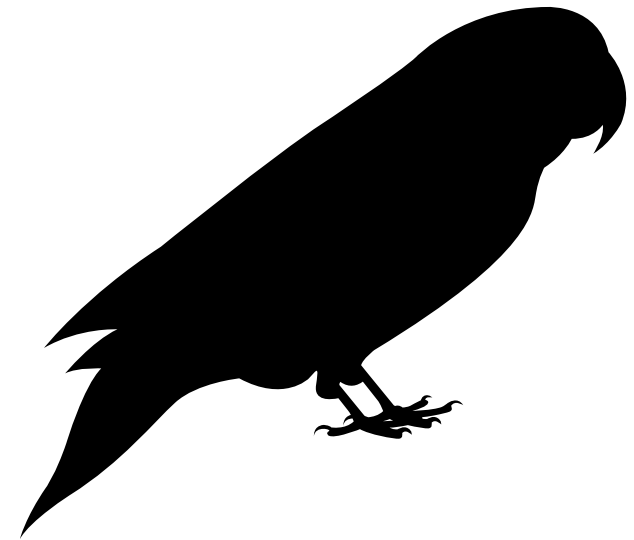
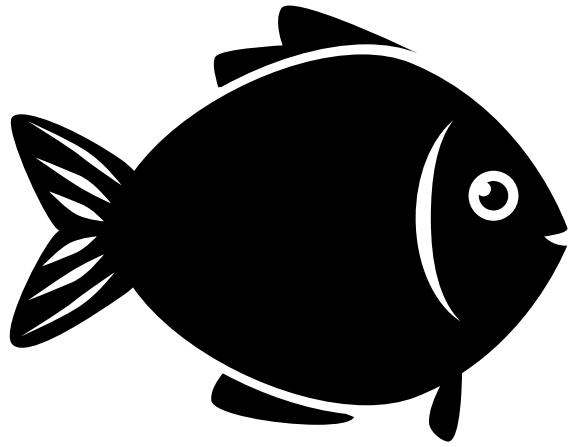
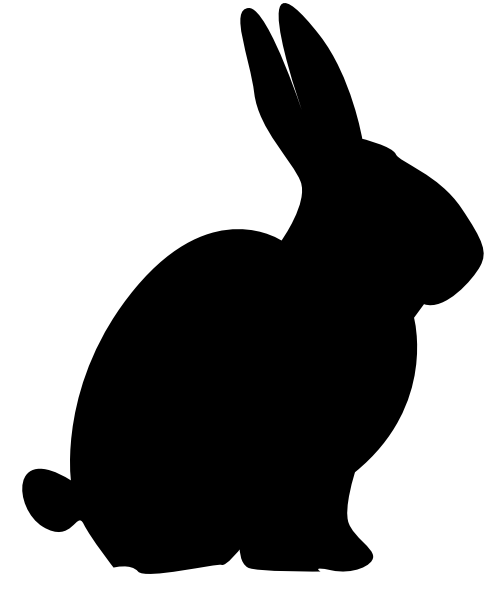
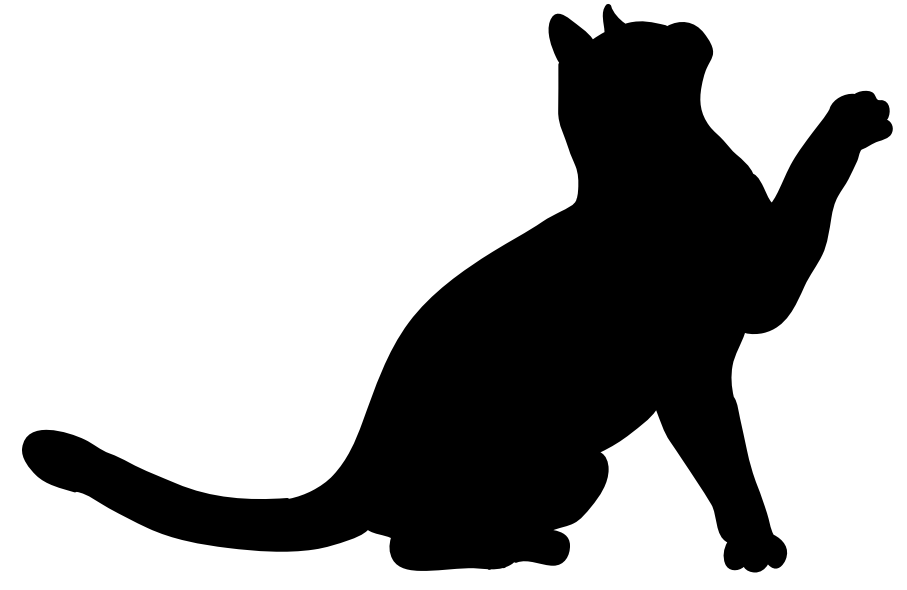
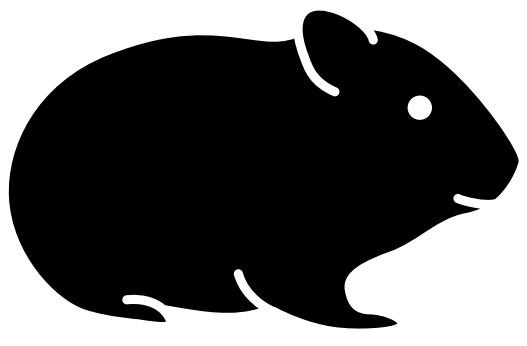
?

home

.....

yes

no



Imaginative Pet Play

Let's plan and co-construct a space for imaginative play with toy animals.

Materials

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Large paper and markers for charting | <input type="checkbox"/> Empty space for play (see note below) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paper and markers for children | <input type="checkbox"/> Printed or digital photos of pet-related shops and spaces |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toy pets, such as cats and dogs | |

Prepare for this experience by creating an empty space for dramatic play. Equip it with an empty table and shelf and signs that say "Coming Soon." Ideally, this space will be located in or near your traditional dramatic play area.

Begin the small group experience by showing children the empty play area and the collection of toy pets. Could you work together to transform this space into a pet care space? Think together about the space you might create. Possibilities include a pet supply shop, a groomer's shop, a veterinarian's office, or even a dog park!

Once you've decided on a space to create, work together to make a web or list of things you might find there. For example, a groomer's shop might have a tub, sprayer, bottles of shampoo and conditioner, brushes, hairdryer, and so on. After you've made an initial web or list, look at photos together to find more ideas to add.

Talk with children about how to transform your empty space. What can you find or make?

- You and the children may remember props in the classroom or storage area that can be repurposed. For example, a doctor's kit could become veterinarian tools. A large plastic bin could become a tub for bathing pretend pets.
- Children may want to bring items from home. They can help create a letter to families with a list of things that you are collecting.
- Children may want to use art materials to create props for their play area. For example, cardboard could be used for dog park features, or pet treats could be made from construction paper.
- Children may suggest buying props. It's OK to explain that you do not have money for more dramatic play props and/or that you want to focus on props that you can make or find. However, if you do plan to purchase something, children could talk about options and vote to decide on a most desired item to be purchased

Imaginative Pet Play (cont.)

Over the next few days, encourage individuals or small groups of children to take part in making signs, building props, and arranging shelves. Children will be excited to see their imaginative pet play area take shape! Mark off things on your list as they are added to the space.

Helpful Hints

Remember that the process of creating a play space has value for children. Their ideas may differ from adults', and the finished play space will be unique. It may also change over time as children think of new ideas. Consider hanging a sign at adult eye level to explain that the children planned and designed this play space.

Including Every Explorer

This experience offers many different ways for children to be involved. Adults can subtly help each child find appealing options that are well-matched to their individual interests and abilities.

Guide prop choices with children's abilities in mind. Some children may become confused about what they can or cannot do with materials. We can set children up for success by providing props that suit their age and experience level.

- To avoid damaging toy animals, use plastic playdough scissors instead of real scissors.
- For less experienced groups, offer pencils rather than ink pens with clipboards.
- Older children may enjoy making pet food/treats by rolling balls of air-drying clay. Younger children may be tempted to put these in their mouths and be safer with paper treats or empty treat boxes.

More to Do (optional)

- Arrange for each small group of children to give a tour of their space to other adults in your program or create a video tour for families.
- If your group takes field trips, arrange a trip to a place that inspired your play area. After the trip, revisit your web/list. What would children like to add?

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Language Development – LD 1.1, LD 2.1, LD 3.1

Emergent Literacy - EL 1.1, EL 3.1, EL 3.2, EL 3.3

Social Studies - SS 1.1

Meet the Pet People

Let's meet people who can tell us more and answer our questions about pets. Repeat this experience as often as possible to enable children to meet many different pet owners and experts.

Materials

Large, blank index cards

Dark ink pens or markers

As you plan this learning experience, seek out people who have some expertise about pets. Possibilities include - but are not limited to - someone who works at a pet supply store or participates in pet shows or sports, a pet groomer, a veterinarian or veterinary technician, an animal shelter volunteer, or a pet owner.

Invite one person at a time to visit with children in person or using a video conference tool. Explain to your guest that they will interact with children a few at a time and plan enough time so that every child has a chance to visit. You can also invite your guest to bring some interesting things to show children. For example, a veterinarian might bring a stethoscope, otoscope, colorful compression bandages, and small animal scale.

Safety Note

What about dogs? Some guests may offer to bring their dogs or other pets to visit. This requires very careful consideration. Our busy preschool environment can be stressful for pets; some pets may react in unexpected ways that put children at risk.

Teachers, administrators, and families should work together to determine program policies about dogs and other pets. If it is decided that pet visits will occur, all visiting pets should be well trained, fully vaccinated, used to crowds and children, and under the owner's control at all times. Having children meet a pet through the playground fence or watch a demonstration from a distance may be safer alternatives to close contact.

Before the guest arrives, tell the children a bit about what the guest does. "Our guest is a pet sitter. When someone needs to travel, she goes to their house to take care of their pets while they are away." Invite children to think about questions they would like to ask. Write each child's question on one side on an index card and have them write their name on the back.

When the guest arrives, help them get set up to become a special learning center during indoor or outdoor play. Children will come over a few at a time to meet the guest and ask their questions.

Meet the Pet People (cont.)

As each child visits with the guest, help them find his/her question card and ask that question. Ask children what they would like to draw and/or have you write down on their cards so that they can remember the guest's answers. Later, during whole group gathering times, invite a few children at a time to share their questions and answers with the group. What did they learn from the guest?

Helpful Hints

Interacting with a few children at a time creates a richer, more meaningful experience for both the guest and the children. Children get a closer look and have more individualized interactions. Some children may only want to visit briefly, while highly interested children will linger longer.

At first, children may crowd around or worry about being left out. With consistent opportunities to practice, they will come to trust that everyone will get a turn.

Including Every Explorer

More impulsive children may have a tough time waiting for a turn. Subtly include them in the first group to visit with the guest.

Some children are slow to warm to new people. They may prefer to hang back, watching and listening from a distance. You might ask these children if they would like for you to ask their questions.

Some older preschoolers may prefer to use inventive spelling to write their own questions and answers.

More to Do (optional)

- After the visit, work together to create a card or memento to thank your guest.
- If your guest works in a public setting such as a pet supply store, invite families to take their children for a visit.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Social and Emotional Development - SE 1.2, SE 3.2

Language Development – LD 1.1, LD 2.1, LD 3.1

Emergent Literacy – EL 1.1, EL 3.1, EL 3.2, EL 3.3

Social Studies - SS 1.1

Small Pet Guest

Let's look closely at a small pet. What will we notice?

Materials

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small pet in a safe, comfortable enclosure | <input type="checkbox"/> Magnifying glasses and camera (optional) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paper and drawing tools | <input type="checkbox"/> Large paper and marker for charting (optional) |

Prepare for this experience by inviting someone to bring a small pet to visit the classroom. Here are some possibilities.

- Guinea pig or rabbit in a wire cage
- Hermit crab, pet tarantula, or gecko in a tank
- Hamster, gerbil, hedgehog, or mouse in a small animal habitat
- Parakeet or canary in a birdcage

Begin by asking the pet's owner what you need to know to keep their pet safe during the visit. For example, some pets are sensitive to drafts or require a heat source. Schedule a visit for several hours or a day.

Next, talk with the children about the upcoming visit. How would it feel to be a small pet in a bright, busy classroom? What are some ways that children can help the pet feel safe? Talk with children about using soft voices and gentle hands around a pet. Remind them that they'll observe the pet a few at a time to avoid crowding, but everyone will get a turn.

Create a space where small groups of children can observe the pet. Look closely with children. What do they notice? What questions do they have? You may want to make a chart of children's responses. Invite children to make observational drawings of the pet and enclosure. Children may also want to take photos of things that interest them.

Later, find ways to help individual children seek answers to their questions by reading books, researching online, or asking the pet's owner.

Consider repeating this experience several times to enable children to observe a variety of small pets.

Small Pet Guest (cont.)

Helpful Hints

Survey colleagues, families, and friends of the classroom to identify potential pet visitors.

Interactions with animals offer valuable opportunities for children to learn empathy. Look for ways to model kindness while helping children consider the pet's needs and feelings.

Sign-up sheets are one way to help children take turns during popular activities like this one.

Including Every Explorer

Provide guidelines to help children keep pets safe. Younger and more impulsive children, especially, may need close supervision and patient reminders. Plan alternative play choices for children who prefer to engage in something more active.

A tablet computer with a camera can be mounted on a stable stand to create an accessible photography tool for children with limited use of hands. This setup can also increase visibility for children with limited vision.

More to Do (optional)

- Create a display of photos and drawings of your pet guest.
- Invite several different small pets to visit on other days. Create a chart comparing their bedding, food, shelter, and water source. Or, compare the number of legs, tail/no tail, and body covering (fur, scales, and so on.)
- Consider a classroom pet. This commitment and responsibility should only occur when classroom staff plan to house and care for the pet on weekends, holidays, and other days when school is closed.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Social and Emotional Development – SE 2.2

Cognitive Development – CD 1.1, CD 2.1, CD 2.3, CD 3.2

Emergent Literacy – EL 1.1, EL 1.2, EL 3.1, EL 3.3

Science and Technology – ST 1.1, ST 3.1, ST 3.3

Which Pet?

Let's play a guessing game to stretch our knowledge of pets.

Materials

- Realistic toy pets or pet photo cards from this curriculum
- 3-5 identical tokens, such as game chips or pebbles

Invite children to play a game. Arrange the toy pets or pet photo cards on the tabletop and place the tokens in a row to your right. Children should sit across from you.

Explain that you're thinking of one of the pets, and their job is to figure out what it is. Instead of just guessing pets, they'll get clues by asking questions that can be answered with yes or no. The tokens indicate how many questions they will ask.

When the first child in the group asks a question, answer it and slide a token from right to left. Here's an example.

Child: Does it have whiskers?

Adult: Yes, it has whiskers. (slides token)

After all the turns have been taken, recap the answers to children's questions. Touch each token as you go, as in the example below.

Adult (touching each of four tokens with children chiming in): You've figured out that it has whiskers, it has fur, it does not have a long tail, and it does not eat meat. Have you figured out which pet I'm thinking of?

Children: Cat?

If the first guess is not correct, remove that pet from the table. If the guess was illogical, prompt children to figure out why. ("Hmmm – do cats usually have long tails?")

Review the clues and guess again. Celebrate teamwork as children figure out the answer. "You did it!"

Children may need a little help at first but will quickly get the hang of the game. Eventually, you can challenge them to recall questions and answers with decreasing support from you.

Which Pet? (cont.)

Helpful Hints

If you are using the pet photo cards from this curriculum, they can be made sturdier by mounting them to chipboard. You may also want to laminate them or cover them with clear contact paper.

Review questions and answers throughout the game to help children develop recall and logical thinking skills. Ask questions like these to stretch children's thinking: What have we figured out about the pet so far? How many turns do you have left? How can you tell?

Including Every Explorer

Simplify the game for younger preschoolers and children with special needs. For example, they might listen to one fact about the pet and then immediately guess. The clue-guess cycle can continue until the mystery pet is found.

The oldest, most experienced preschoolers will be eager to take a turn to think of a pet for others to guess.

More to Do (optional)

- Repeat this game later in your pet investigation. Notice how children's questions reflect new knowledge and vocabulary.
- Stack the cards in a deck, face down. Turn over one card and pose a question that can be answered "yes," "no," or "sometimes."
 - Do dogs have paws? (Yes)
 - Do dogs have long tails? (Sometimes)
 - Do dogs lay eggs? (No)

Invite children to ask questions, as well. Use this activity to stimulate conversations and invite the use of resources, such as books and photos, to help answer questions.

- Which pets could you add to this collection? Offer blank cards and drawing tools to make additions, such as a gerbil, boa constrictor, or miniature pig.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Cognitive Development – CD 1.2, CD 2.1, CD 2.3, CD 2.4, CD 3.1

Language Development – LD 1.1, LD 2.1, LD 3.1

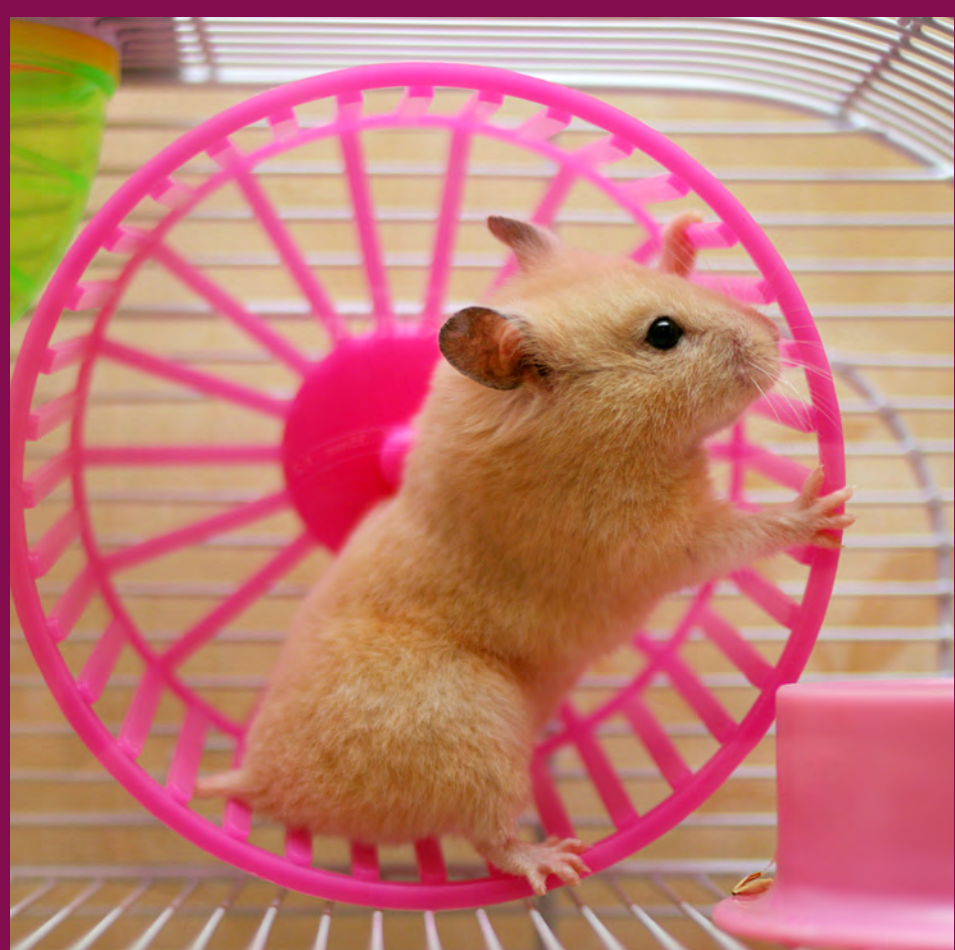
Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1, MT 3.1



cat



dog



hamster



guinea pig



gecko



parakeet



chinchilla



goldfish



hermit crab



ferret



iguana



rabbit

Soft Toy Pets

Let's use children's soft toy pets in creative ways.

Materials

- Soft toy cats, dogs, and other pets
- Paper and markers for charting
- Cardboard boxes, construction paper, and other open-ended art materials
- Scissors, tape, glue, and markers

Invite children to bring a soft toy pet to school. During small group, invite each child to show and talk about the toy pet. They can share where their toy came from and what they like best about them. What questions do children have for one another?

Here are some additional ways to interact with the toy animals.

- Make a chart with each child's name, the kind of animal, and the animal's name.
Caleb has a rabbit named Big Bun.
Jasmine has a dog named Skye.
Amelia has a cat named Lucy.

Point out letters and words as you write, and invite children to help in ways that suit their development. This might include spelling or writing their own names, or sounding out the initial sound in their pet's name. Help children notice patterns in language: “**B**ig **B**un—both words begin with B!”

- Arrange animals from smallest to largest.
- Sort or tally by attributes. How many of the animals have spots? Tails? A collar?
- Find ways that animals are alike and different. “Jasmine's pet and Erin's pet both have paws. Jasmine's pet has short fur, but Erin's has long fur.”
- Ask, “What would you like to make for your pet?” Art materials can be used to make beds, collars, leashes, clothes, name signs, and more.

Later, during a brief whole group gathering, read the charts from each group and/or invite children to show what they made for their pets.

Soft Toy Pets (cont.)

Helpful Hints

- Plan to have extra toy pets available for children who do not bring a toy from home.
- Let families know that art materials will be used around toy pets. Sturdy toys that can withstand active play are recommended, and toys with great sentimental or monetary value should stay home.

Including Every Explorer

If your group includes a child who is not yet verbal, talk with a family member to find out some information that you can share. “Leo brought his green toy turtle. His uncle bought it for him when they visited the aquarium for Leo’s birthday.” If possible, invite the child to communicate by nodding or using a communication board to answer questions.

More to Do (optional)

- Invite children to bring their toy pets to a special storytime. *Pet Show!* by Ezra Jack Keats is one classic possibility.
- Create a pet show by displaying the pets and child-created props on a table or shelf. Write down children’s statements about their pets and props on cards that can be displayed next to each one. Invite families and others to visit the pet show.
- Decorate wagons and take your pets on parade!
- Invite each child to take a close-up photo of their toy pet. Or, take a portrait photo of each child with their pet. Paint or decorate picture frames.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Cognitive Development - CD 1.2, CD 2.1, CD 2.4, CD 3.1, CD 3.2

Physical Development and Health - PH 2.1, PH 2.2

Language Development - LD 2.1, LD 3.1

Mathematical Thinking - MY 1.2, MT 2.1, MT 3.1

Creativity and Aesthetics - CA 2.1, CA 3.1

Dog Treats

Let's bake treats that we can share with dogs at home or an animal shelter. Always wash hands and tables before food experiences.

Materials

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Whole wheat or all-purpose flour | <input type="checkbox"/> Large mixing bowl and spoon |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Canned pumpkin | <input type="checkbox"/> Spoons and can opener |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peanut butter or sunflower seed butter | <input type="checkbox"/> Baking sheet |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eggs | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-stick cooking spray, parchment paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Measuring cups and spoons | <input type="checkbox"/> Rolling pin, cookie cutters, and spatula (optional) |

These baked treats are safe for children to taste (once baked) but are really for dogs! Decide beforehand: Will children will take treats home for dogs they know? Or will your group donate treats to a local animal shelter or rescue?

As children join you for small group, begin by talking with children about dogs and treats. Have children had any experiences with dogs who like treats? Have they been to a store that sells dog food and treats? Do they want to try making their own dog treats today?

Invite children to help measure $\frac{2}{3}$ cup canned pumpkin puree and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup peanut butter. Stir these together in a large mixing bowl. With children's help, add 2 eggs and mix well. Add $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups of flour a little at a time, taking turns stirring until smooth dough forms. Notice how the dough changes as you mix it.

Turn the dough onto a clean, floured work surface. Invite each child in the small group to take a turn to knead the dough a few times, sprinkling with more flour as needed when the dough gets sticky.

Next, you may roll out the dough and cut out shapes with a cookie cutter. Or, roll dough balls with your hands and flatten them with your palms to make round dog cookies. Wash hands after handling the dough.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Spray a baking sheet with non-stick spray or line it with parchment paper. Transfer the treats to the prepared baking sheet and for 20-30 minutes, depending on size. Treats are done when they are crispy, with golden-brown edges. Let them cool for at least 10 minutes before removing them from the baking sheet.

Later, invite children to help bag or box treats to take home or share. Be sure that they are clearly labeled as dog treats!

Dog Treats (cont.)

Helpful Hints

- You may want to carry out this small group experience over several days so that each group has an unhurried opportunity to participate.
- Children may want to sing or count to help time turns stirring and kneading.
- During the final step, you can reduce waiting time by dividing the dough into smaller portions for children to roll and cut simultaneously.
- Children may want to smell and taste the pumpkin and peanut butter. Raw dough with eggs should not be tasted. However, the baked treats are safe for children to taste if desired.
- Because these treats do not contain preservatives, they should be consumed within one week.

Including Every Explorer

If your facility is peanut-free or your group includes a child with a nut allergy, sunflower seed butter may be substituted for peanut butter.

An electric mixer can be used if your group includes children with limited use of their hands or children who are unlikely to remain engaged while stirring.

More to Do (optional)

- If your group is donating treats to an animal shelter, take photos or record a short video for children when you drop off the treats.
- If children take treats home, take a poll: “Did your dog like the treats?”
- Make copies of the dog treat recipe to share with children’s families. Invite children to recall the steps of the recipe. What did we do first? What did we do next?

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Physical Development and Health – PH 2.1, PH 2.2, PH 3.2

Science and Technology - ST 2.1, ST 3.1

Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1, MT 3.1

Simple Cat Toys

Let's use an instructional checklist to create a toy for cats.

Materials

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Large paper and marker for chart | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baby or toddler-sized socks | <input type="checkbox"/> Jingle bells |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fiberfill | <input type="checkbox"/> Plastic zip ties <u>or</u> needle and thread |

Decide beforehand about whether children will take these homes for cats they know or whether your group will donate the toys to a local animal shelter or rescue.

Before you invite children to join you, make a checklist with the following steps.

1. Pick a sock.
2. Add some stuffing.
3. Add a bell.
4. Zip it closed. (Or, sew it closed.)
5. Fold it over.

As a small group of children joins you, show them a completed “sock ball” cat toy. Think together about how a cat might play with it. Children may want to try batting the toy across the table with their paws (hands), and they may notice the sound of the jingle bell. Ask children how they think the toy was made, and then show them the toy-making materials. Would they like to make a cat toy? Explain that the checklist gives instructions in sequential order. You can follow it together, step-by-step, to make cat toys.

Look together at the first step on the list: “pick a sock.” Read this step aloud, running your finger under the words as you read. Once everyone in the small group has selected a sock, invite a child to check that item off the list. Continue to follow the steps in order.

- Add some stuffing by filling the foot of the sock with fiberfill.
- Tuck a jingle bell into the middle of the fiberfill.
- Use a zip tie or needle and thread to seal the sock just above the heel.
- Fold the ankle portion of the sock over. Wrap it over the foot of the sock to make a ball.

Invite children to check off each completed step as you go. When you're finished, try to recall each of the steps in order. What happened first? Second? Third?

Simple Cat Toys (cont.)

Helpful Hints

Families may be able to donate outgrown socks. Or, large, inexpensive packs of socks can be found at discount stores. Plain white socks can be decorated with non-toxic fabric crayons or even tie-dyed if desired.

Fiberfill is used to stuff pillows. It can be found at craft supply stores.

Including Every Explorer

Challenge older, more experienced preschoolers by having a friendly colleague ask, “Can you teach me how to make one?” Children will use sequencing skills and precise language as they give instructions.

Did You Know?

This isn’t an art project; it’s a craft. Crafts should usually be avoided because they do not help children use critical or creative thinking. A rare exception is made here because making toys for pets can be a gratifying service project for young children.

On this occasion, precise instructions are favored over open-ended toy-making to protect the safety of cats. (Small/loose parts are choking hazards.) The instruction checklist helps elevate the activity by encouraging children to sequence. Even so, activities in which children have few opportunities to make decisions should make up only a very small part of the overall curriculum.

More to Do

- If your group is donating toys to an animal shelter, take photos or record a short video for children when you drop off the treats.
- If children take toys home for cats they know, invite them to share a photo or video of their cat with the toy.
- Another simple cat toy can be made by knotting strips of fleece fabric.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Cognitive Development – CD 2.1, CD 2.4

Emergent Literacy – EL 1.1, EL 3.1, EL 3.2

Mathematical Thinking – MT 1.1

Social Studies - SS 1.1

Pet Research

Let's focus on a pet that especially interests us.

Materials

From the list below, choose available materials that suit children's interests and abilities.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paper and writing tools | <input type="checkbox"/> Printer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resource books about pets | <input type="checkbox"/> Drawing materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sticky notes | <input type="checkbox"/> Pet photo cards from this curriculum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital device(s) | |

You might wish to begin with the photo cards from this curriculum. Each small group will focus on a pet of particular interest. Which pet are children most interested in learning more about?

Work together to use books to find to seek answers to four questions.

- Habitat: Where does this pet live?
- Food: What does this pet eat?
- Life cycle: What is this pet called when it is young? How does it grow and change?
- Other: What else is interesting about this pet?

Label a separate sheet of paper for each question listed above.

Children can look through books for illustrations or photos that relate to the pet. Read captions and/or excerpts aloud and ask children whether there is anything that they feel should be added to the question pages. Together, write and draw facts on sticky notes to add to the pages.

If you have an Internet-connected device and printer, look for images on www.photosforclass.com. Children can help type their pet into the search bar and select a photo to print.

When children feel satisfied with their research, create a poster or simple book with note pages, drawings, and photos. Plan a time when the small group can share about their pet during a brief, whole group gathering.

Pet Research, (cont.)

Helpful Hints

You may wish to have groups identify a pet on one day and begin research on another day after you've had a chance to go to the library and/or preview digital resources.

Alternatively, you could gather books about three to five different pets and invite children to sign up for one of these groups.





Including Every Explorer

When sharing this activity with children, ensure that the tone is relaxed and engaging. Watch children for cues, focusing with enthusiasm on the parts they seem interested in and concluding the activity before they seem restless.

The activity may be shortened and simplified as needed for younger and/or less experienced children and children with special needs. For example, you might focus on just one of the questions or break the activity up into short sessions over several days. Preview books to highlight content that is likely to be of greatest interest.

More to Do (optional)

- Use clay or other three-dimensional art materials to make pet representations. (Highly recommended.)
- Use art materials to make pet masks and/or costumes. These should be imagined and created by children rather than adult-directed crafts.
- Clip a large photo from Photos for Class next to your easel. Invite children to choose paint colors to make paintings inspired by the image.
- Make a chart that compares the habitat and food source of each pet studied by the groups. Hang the completed chart where children can easily view and talk about it.

	lives	eats
 parrot		
 snail		
 guinea pig		
 dog		

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Language Development – LD 1.1, LD 2.1, LD 3.1

Emergent Literacy - EL 1.1, EL 1.2, EL 2.1, EL 3.1, EL 3.2, EL 3.3

Science and Technology - ST 1.1, ST 3.1, ST 3.3

Class Mascots, part 1

Let's create a life-sized pet to be part of our class. This is a two-part experience.

Materials

- Picture books with/about pets
- Large sheet of paper for collaborative drawing
- Black markers
- Sticky notes and pencils (optional)

Read through *Class Mascot, part 1*, and *Class Mascot, part 2* before you begin.

As children join you, begin by looking informally at a collection of picture books. Children should be able to hold and trade books freely. Page through the books to examine illustrations of pets. What pets can children find in the books and what do they notice about those pets?

Decide together on one kind of pet to focus on for the remainder of this experience. For example, one group might focus on dogs while another focuses on cats. Sort out books that include the group's focus pet.

Next, decide together about what your pet could look like. Ask a series of friendly, informal questions to arrive at a description. For example, a group focusing on dogs might decide on a large dog with spots, a long tail, and floppy ears.

Introduce the large paper for collaborative drawing. Ask, "I wonder if we could work together to create a portrait of our pet? I'll get us started." Start by drawing a large body and head. Use basic shapes, such as ovals. Ask, "What else does our (pet) need?"

As children suggest additions, such as legs, toes, claws, tail, and facial features, hand them the marker and invite them to add on to the drawing. Ensure that everyone in the small group is invited to contribute. You may wish to look through your picture books again for inspiration. Keep adding to the drawing until children feel that it is complete.

Decide on a name for your pet, and write the pet's name at the top of the page. Invite each of the collaborative artists to sign their names at the bottom of the page.

Optional: Older preschoolers may enjoy labeling the parts of their pet, such as ears, nose, and tail, by writing words on sticky notes that can be added to the drawing. Help interested children copy, spell, or sound out words depending on their current abilities.

Class Mascots part 1, (cont.)

Helpful Hints

Children should have opportunities for independent, open-ended drawing every day. The occasional collaborative drawing activity like this one encourages young artists to think together about parts of a whole. It's a chance to use descriptive vocabulary and consider different drawing techniques.

A collaborative drawing represents the ideas of all of the artists. You might remind children to make large marks on the page but resist the urge to change children's work. This experience is all about the process of working together.

Including Every Explorer

Model and teach that every team member's contributions are welcome and valid. Marks have meaning to the artist, even before they are identifiable to others. Children should be invited but not required to contribute to the collaborative drawing. Some children may also prefer to make marks on a piece of paper on a clipboard.

More to Do (optional)

- Invite children to use crayons to add color to the pet. The drawing might be made available during playtime for children who wish to work on it.
- Display the collaborative drawings where families can enjoy them or take photos to share. Use Scotch tape or a glue stick to secure sticky notes to the page.
- During brief whole group gatherings, invite each small group to show and talk about their drawing. Take a photo of each group of artists with their collaborative work.
- Add simple, labeled pet diagrams or picture/word cards to your classroom writing area. Notice whether children seem interested in labeling their own drawings.
- If children seem especially interested in picture books, consider an author study. For example, you might explore the books, *Top Cat*, *Wag a Tail*, *Feathers for Lunch*, and *Rrralphaa*—all by Lois Ehlert. Try making your own paper collage pets inspired by Ehlert's style. Or, create stories inspired by Devin Scillian's *Memoirs* series.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Social and Emotional Development - SE 1.2, SE 3.1, SE 3.2

Cognitive Development – CD 1.1, CD 1.2, CD 2.1, CD 2.3, CD 2.4, CD 3.2

Emergent Literacy - EL 1.1, EL 1.2, EL 3.1, EL 3.2, EL 3.3

Science and Technology - ST 3.1

Class Mascots, part 2

Let's create life-sized, three-dimensional representations of our pets. This is a multi-day experience.

Materials

- Collaborative drawings from *Class Mascots, part 1*
- Paper mâché materials (see note below) or other 3-D art materials
- Paints, smocks, and brushes
- Construction paper, felt, or other materials for embellishments
- Vinyl tablecloth or another protective table covering

In paper mâché, strips of newspaper or other thin paper are dipped in a runny paste and applied to a frame. The frame is often made of cardboard, twisted/balled paper, or wire. Plastic bottles and inflated balloons can also be covered with paper mâché. Once dried, paper mâché pets may be sturdy enough to become a part of children's dramatic play and to serve as classroom mascots for weeks or months to come.

Although decision-making should be shared with children, it can be helpful for the adult to become familiar with the paper mâché process ahead of time. Here are some examples that highlight paper mâché techniques.

Paper mâché dog - <https://www.smallhandsbigart.com/papier-mache-wiener-dogs/>

Another paper mâché dog - <https://www.upcyclecrc.org/upcycles-blog/art-safari-we-made-a-papier-mache-pet-and-so-much-more>

Paper mâché snake - <https://hilliardart.wordpress.com/2014/06/09/papier-mache-snakes/>

Paper mâché turtle - <http://aboutfamilycrafts.com/paper-mache-patchwork-turtle-craft/>

As children join you, look again at the collaborative drawing you created. Do they remember the pet, name, and details? Would children like to make a sturdy, full-sized representation of their pet?

Begin by making a frame (form) with legs, body, and head. Show children how to apply strips of newspaper to completely cover the frame. This may be worked on over several days if desired. Once the frame is covered, set it aside until completely dry.

Next, work together to paint your pet. Once the paint is dry, add embellishments such as felt ears, a collar with a name tag, and so on. Follow children's ideas about what to add.

Class Mascots part 2, (cont.)

Helpful Hints

Paper mâché paste can be made by mixing flour and water or by thinning white school glue with water. Thinned glue is less likely to mold while drying. Newspaper is traditionally used for paper mâché, but strips of fabric, plain newsprint paper, or printer paper can also be used.

A large-scale paper mâché project like this one can deepen children’s science and engineering knowledge. Work together to figure out the best techniques to build the frame and make the paper stick. Notice how the shell hardens as it dries. Children may enjoy using a hairdryer to help dry their creations.

If you do not want to use paper mâché, your pets could be made from cardboard or created in another way. Although an adult may suggest the technique and tools, as many decisions as possible should be made by children.

Including Every Explorer

Children with sensory aversions may prefer not to touch the paste-covered newspaper. Think together about other ways that they can participate if they would like to. For example, this child might rip dry newspaper into strips or design a sign with the pet’s name.

More to Do (optional)

- Take photos at each step of the pet-making process. These can be used for sequencing cards and/or a timeline display.
- Find ways to involve your finished pets in classroom routines and activities. For example, children might read stories to a paper mâché pet in the library area. Or, a pet might sit in your arrival area to welcome children and families.

This experience offers special opportunities to build and strengthen:

Social and Emotional Development – SE 1.2

Cognitive Development - CD 1.1, CD 1.2, CD 2.1, CD 3.1

Mathematical Thinking - MT 1.1, MT 3.1, MT 4.1

Science and Technology – ST 2.1, ST 3.1, ST 3.2

Active Physical Play – Pets

Invite children to participate in activities such as these during outdoor play times. Some children will want to join in, while others will prefer to continue their own free choice play. Some activities found in this section may also be appropriate for indoor gross motor play or active group gatherings.

Animal Action

Try moving across your space or around in a large circle while sashaying like cats, hopping like rabbits, or crawling like turtles. What other animal actions would children like to try?

Preschool Agility

Look together at photos or [videos](#) of a dog agility course. Enlist children’s help to create a ground-level agility (obstacle) course for your active play areas. Possibilities include cones to weave through, a tunnel to crawl through, a pool noodle to jump over, and so on. Designing an agility course to share with others could also be an engaging small group learning experience.

The Bunny Hop

Use a music player as you teach children the traditional dance, The Bunny Hop. Once children understand the basic steps, form a line and hop-dance together around the play area.

Where, Oh Where, Has My Little Dog Gone (hide and seek game)

Teach children the traditional song, “Where, Oh Where, Has My Little Dog Gone?” Take turns hiding a toy dog in the play area for others to seek or invite one child to hide while other players cover their eyes and count. Sing together as you search for the missing dog. Adapt the song to search for other pets.

Pet Strollers

Pair doll strollers or simple real strollers with soft toy pets. Offer a spacious area where children can take pets for rides. Wagons are fun for transporting toy pets, too. (Are pet strollers a real thing? And if so, when are they used? Research together to find out!)

Even More Pet Experiences

- Invite families to share photos of pets at home and other pets that children know well. Create a photo book or display.
- Arrange for small groups to visit pets in other rooms in your program. Which pet is most popular? Which is the biggest pet? The smallest? What else do children notice?
- If your group has a class pet, involve children in the pet's care. Children can help feed pets, fill water bottles, offer treats, sweep up around a pet enclosure, and so on. Always wash hands thoroughly after handling pets, food, bedding, or other supplies.
- If your group takes field trips, plan a trip in response to children's interests. Here are some possibilities.
 - Observe a dog park (from a safe distance outside the park enclosure).
 - Visit a store that sells food and supplies for pets.
 - Go for a walk to spot neighborhood pets.
- Plan to send a soft toy pet home to visit each child overnight. Children can share photos and/or help an adult write about the pet's visit to their home in a journal.

Notes:

Concluding Your Pet Exploration

1. With your teaching team, think about and discuss the following questions.

What new experiences have our children had during this exploration? What new knowledge and skills have developed?

Do the children seem ready to conclude this exploration? Have their questions been answered? Is their interest waning? If children are still excited about pets, think about ways to continue and extend the investigation.

How can we document children's learning and help children share what they have learned with others?

Your pet exploration might end with one of these activities.

- Invite families and others to visit a display of children's paper mâché pets, alongside drawings, paintings, and photos of children's experiences.
- Work with children to create a pet care guide to share with families. Children can dictate words and draw pictures about taking care of pets.
- Invite children to serve as experts as they help another group prepare to add a class pet. What advice do they have to share?
- Host a stuffed toy adoption event where each child chooses and takes home an inexpensive toy pet to keep. Create a mock shelter, complete with veterinary area, adoption applications, and adoption certificates.

2. Talk with children about their favorite memories about your pet investigation. Model gratitude by creating thank you cards or letters to the families, school members, and community members who supported your group.
3. Where will you go next? Use your observations and conversations with children to help you plan and begin your next exploration.