

THEME:
MYSTERIES UNCOVERED

IT'S RAINING CATS & DOGS

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What are the underlying causes of dog and cat homelessness, and how can this problem be resolved?

OVERVIEW

Students will learn about dog and cat homelessness and uncover the mysteries behind this problem. Some of the reasons may seem clear to students, but some of the reasons are hidden from view. Students will read different homeless animal stories, participate in small group and whole class discussions, and watch a video to discover the reasons for the problem. Students will conclude the lesson by considering ways to reduce and prevent animal homelessness.

OBJECTIVE

Students will be able to...

- Define *dog and cat homelessness* and *overpopulation*.
- Compare and contrast an animal shelter and a pet store.
- Identify four ways to reduce animal homelessness.

1. Warm Up (10 min.)

- Show students two pictures of a dog and cat on the street. Ask them to discuss all their initial observations and any questions they have about both pictures with a partner. Then ask them to share with the whole class.
- ➡ Allow for responses. Through their observations, facilitate a discussion, and cover the following points:
 - The dog and cat are both homeless or *stray*.
 - They probably do not have anyone to take care of them, give them love, or provide them with veterinary care.
 - They might face a lot of dangers on the street including getting hurt by cars, insufficient food, lack of healthful food, little to no access to clean water, no proper shelter, and/or becoming sick or injured.

GRADE LEVEL 3-5

TIME NEEDED 60 min.

SUBJECTS English Language Arts,
Social Studies

STANDARDS

Common Core
ELA-Literacy: RL.3.1, RL.4.1, RL.5.1
SL.3.1, SL.4.1, SL.5.1

ISTE: Standard 3—Knowledge
Constructor
Standard 4—Innovative
Designer

MATERIALS

- ☐ Homeless dog and cat pictures
- ☐ Vocabulary Terms and Definitions (1 set per student or group)
- ☐ *Homeless Animal Stories* and follow-up questions
- ☐ H.E.A.R.T.'s *What is a Puppy Mill?* video: <http://teachheart.org/educational-videos/>

OPTIONAL

- H.E.A.R.T.'s *What is an Animal Shelter?* video: <http://teachheart.org/educational-videos/>

VOCABULARY/TERMS

- Spay
- Neuter
- Dog and Cat Homelessness
- Dog and Cat Overpopulation
- Forever Home
- Guardian
- Adoption Center
- Puppy Mill
- Domesticated Animal

- Emphasize to students that dog and cat homelessness is a serious problem and that there are several causes for it. Explain that if we can understand some of the reasons for animal homelessness, we can take steps to reduce and prevent the problem.

2. Vocabulary Connection (10 min.)

- Let students know that there are some vocabulary terms you want to share with them to help them better understand the topic.
- Provide them with two stacks of cards: vocabulary terms and definitions. Ask them to match the terms to the definitions. Students can work independently, in pairs, or in small groups.
- Ask for student volunteers to share which term they matched to which definition.
 - ➡ **Dog and Cat Homelessness:** Dogs and cats living outdoors without a guardian or in an animal shelter where they are waiting to be adopted.
 - ➡ **Dog and Cat Overpopulation:** When there are more homeless dogs and cats than there are people who can provide them with loving forever homes.
 - ➡ **Spay/Neuter:** A safe surgery that stops animals from having babies. The surgery is called *spaying* when the animal is female and *neutering* when the animal is male.
 - ➡ **Forever Home:** A loving person or family who will take care of an animal for his/her entire life.
 - ➡ **Guardian:** A person who is responsible for the care and safety of another.
 - ➡ **Animal Adoption Center:** A temporary shelter for animals, where they are cared for while the shelter workers try to find them a permanent home.
 - ➡ **Domesticated Animal:** An animal who lives in close association with people and depends on them to provide for his/her needs.

3. Homeless Animal Stories (25 min.)

- Break students into groups of four. Tell them to designate one person as the reader, one as the writer, one as the presenter, and one as the time tracker. Everyone should participate in answering the questions. Let the students know how much time they have to complete the activity.
- Provide each group with one story from the *Homeless Animal Stories* Handout and a copy of the corresponding questions. Ask students to read the story and answer their questions. Allow each group to present a summary of their story and their answers to the class.
- When each group finishes presenting, ask the whole class to answer the following questions using their vocabulary words and terms.
 - ➡ Where are all of the homeless animals at the end of their stories?
Answer: An animal adoption center



VOCABULARY TERMS NOTE

When teaching students about the vocabulary term *animal adoption centers*, consider showing H.E.A.R.T.'s video, *What is an Animal Shelter?* Following the video, facilitate a short discussion. This video will help give an overview of what an animal adoption center does.

EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

Kim Korona

While many youth are aware that a great number of dogs and cats live on the street, they are frequently unaware of the many reasons that animals become homeless. Additionally, they often do not understand the difference between buying an animal from a pet store and adopting from an animal shelter. This is a very important distinction for people to understand if they are concerned about the dog and cat homelessness problem. Additionally, while knowledge about puppy mills has increased, it is still a *mystery* hidden from view that also plays a large role in this problem. In learning about this issue, students gain the necessary skills to analyze a problem from multiple perspectives and consider effective strategies for resolving it.

- ➡ What are each of the homeless animals waiting for?

Possible answers: A guardian, a forever home

- ➡ Describe a story that demonstrated the problem of dog and cat overpopulation. Explain your answer.

Example: *Ivy's Story* demonstrates cat overpopulation because the guardian cannot find homes for the kittens, so she brings them to the animal shelter. Then Ivy explains how sad it is to see so many cats there already waiting for homes.

4. Puppy Mills (10 min.)

- Following up from *Forest's Story*, let students know that they are going to learn more about puppy mills.
- Ask if any of them know what a puppy mill is. Allow for responses.
- To help explain what a puppy mill is, show H.E.A.R.T.'s video, *What is a Puppy Mill?*
- ➡ Ask the follow-up questions below:

- What are your initial reactions/thoughts to what you saw in the video? Allow for responses.

- How would you describe a puppy mill?

Possible answers: dirty, animals crammed into small cages, filthy water, little food, dogs with matted fur, sick dogs, dogs standing in their own waste.

- Why are the puppy mill owners breeding dogs?

Possible answer: they want to have a lot of dogs to sell and make money.

- Why do you think they treat the dogs this way?

Possible answers: they are more concerned about their profits than the care of the dogs; it would cost money and time to give the dogs more space, vet care, cleaner conditions, and better food; better care would mean less profit; they think of the dogs as objects instead of living beings; they do not think they have other options for making money.

- Where do the puppies born in the puppy mill go?

Possible answers: sold to pet stores, sold online

- When people buy dogs from puppy mills or from online breeders, how does that contribute to animal homelessness and animal overpopulation?

Possible answers: giving money to support the breeding of more dogs who need homes, whoever buys these dogs could have adopted a homeless animal from the shelter.

RESOURCE LINKS

ASPCA

<http://www.aspca.org/pet-care>

Humane Society of the United States

<http://bit.ly/23kg1nl>

Michigan State University: Animal Center

<http://bit.ly/1qzVKsE>

Pets of the Homeless

<http://bit.ly/1SWizzX>

Puppy Mill Notes

This video may be too challenging for 3rd graders to watch. As an alternative, consider using the resource links to show them a few age-appropriate images to explain what a puppy mill is and describe it in basic terms without being too graphic.

For students who do watch the video, prepare them by explaining that some of what they will see in the video may be upsetting. Let the students know when people see something uncomfortable, they can respond in different ways so they should be respectful of everyone's reactions.

- What can people do if they are concerned about puppy mills?

Possible answers: adopt animals from shelters instead of buying them, write letters to government officials to create stronger anti-puppy mill laws, educate others about the problem, donate money to organizations that have humane investigators working to shut down puppy mills and rescue the dogs there, educate others about the problem.



Puppy Mill Follow Up Questions Note

It is important, when talking about the difference between buying an animal from a pet store and adopting an animal from a shelter, to let students know that some pet stores no longer sell animals. Instead, they only sell pet supplies. Some stores even work with adoption groups, allowing their adoptable animals to stay at the store until they find homes, or hosting adoption events.

5. Wrap Up (5 min.)

- Ask students to review the actions that can be taken to reduce dog and cat homelessness.
- Possible answers: adopting animals instead of buying them, spaying and neutering dogs and cats, providing dogs and cats with ID tags/microchips so that they can be found if they are lost, humane training to teach animals good manners so that they are more likely to remain in the home, writing letters to legislators about stronger puppy mill laws, educating others.

EXTENSION PROJECTS

STEM Connection—Spreading Awareness: After students learn about the reasons for animal homelessness, ask them to create multimedia posters about the problem and possible solutions using <http://www.Glogster.com>. Encourage students to use a variety of media including text, pictures and embedded video to present their information. Show students examples of Glogs such as: <http://bit.ly/1Vws6Sz>. Glogs can also be printed out and hung around the school. You can have an even bigger impact if you identify businesses in the area that will allow you to hang the posters in their establishments.

STEM Connection—Research Project: According to the Coalition for the Homeless, 5%-10% of the homeless population have dog and/or cat companions. In some areas of the country, the rate is as high as 25%. Ask students to conduct an online research project to investigate some of the most common causes for homelessness among people and effective solutions to help in the short term as well as actions to eradicate homelessness in the long term. Ask students to use a safe search engine like www.Kiddle.co to conduct their research. Challenge them to consider the reasons a person who is homeless would have a companion animal, the additional difficulties that person might experience, and suggested solutions that could help both the person and their animal. Allow students to present their research by creating a brochure or slideshow presentation where they incorporate their research.



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VOCABULARY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

For teachers: Make copies of the vocabulary terms and the definitions. Cut out all the words and clip them together. Then cut out each definition, mix them up, and clip them together. Ask students to match the words to the definitions.

Vocabulary Terms	Definitions
Spay/Neuter	A safe surgery that stops animals from having babies. The surgery is called <i>spaying</i> when the animal is female and <i>neutering</i> when the animal is male.
Dog and Cat Homelessness	Dogs and cats living outdoors without a guardian or in an animal shelter where they are waiting to be adopted.
Dog and Cat Overpopulation	When there are more homeless dogs and cats than there are people who can provide them with loving forever homes.
Forever Home	A loving person or family who will take care of an animal for his/her entire life.
Guardian	A person who is responsible for the care and safety of another.
Animal Adoption Center	A temporary shelter for animals, where they are cared for while the shelter workers try to find them a permanent home.
Domesticated Animal	An animal who lives in close association with people and depends on them to provide for his/her needs.

HOMELESS ANIMAL STORIES*



Chloe's Story

Hi, my name is Chloe, and my family really loved me. They let me roam all around our neighborhood. I thought that was cool until I realized how dangerous it was. I ended up way too far from home and could not find my way back. I was picked up and brought to an animal shelter. They wanted to find my family, but they had no way to know who they were. I tried to tell them, but they did not understand my meowing. I was never brought back to my family. I miss them so much.



Duke's Story

I had a great family, and I felt so happy when they were around. They played with me, petted me, and gave me lots of attention. When they were gone for the whole day I missed them. There was nothing to do when they were away, so I chewed things to keep myself busy. I did not know I was doing anything wrong. My family was very upset about it and they became so angry they brought me to an animal shelter and never came back. Now, I am really sad, and I wonder where I will go next.

*These homeless animal stories are fictional and the associated images are not of animals with these backgrounds.

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HOMELESS ANIMAL STORIES*



Ivy's Story

My name is Ivy. My mother was always allowed to roam the neighborhood. One day, when she came back from being out all night, she was pregnant with me and three others. When my siblings and I were born, my mother's guardian did not want to take care of four extra kittens. She tried to give us away for free, but could not find anyone who wanted us. We were scared because she was just going to give us to anyone who came along, without making sure they knew how to treat us. She decided to bring us to an animal shelter. It was sad to see so many other cats already waiting for homes when we arrived.



Forest's Story

My name is Forest. I was born at a puppy mill. Puppy mills are places where people breed dogs to sell at pet stores and online. It was a very dirty and scary place. They did not take very good care of us, and many of the dogs had health problems. My mother lived her entire life there, in a tiny cage, where she was forced to become pregnant over and over again. Then her puppies, including me, were shipped to different pet stores to be sold. I lived at the pet store for several months, but no one wanted to buy me. Once I became a little older, the pet store owner was concerned he would lose money on me. His daughter did not like her father's business. She convinced him to let me go. She brought me to an animal adoption center. I hope that someone nice will adopt me and take care of me. I still think about my mom and hope that she is okay.

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CHLOE'S STORY

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION GUIDE

Directions: Read *Chloe's Story*, then write your responses in the notes section. Use evidence and quotes from the text when appropriate.

Chloe's Story Questions

Notes

1. How did Chloe end up at the animal shelter?	
2. What do you think it is like for Chloe living at the animal shelter compared to living in a home?	
3. What do you think Chloe's family thought about when she never came home? How do you think they felt?	
4. What could Chloe's family do to try to find her now?	
5. If you were Chloe's family, what would you do differently to prevent her from becoming lost?	



DUKE'S STORY

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION GUIDE

Directions: Read *Duke's Story*, then write your responses in the notes section. Use evidence and quotes from the text when appropriate.

Duke's Story Questions

Notes

1. Why did Duke's family get upset with him?	
2. Compare how Duke felt when his family was home to when they were away.	
3. Imagine that you are Duke. What do you think he would say to his family if he could talk?	
4. What could Duke's family have done to prevent him from chewing?	
5. Based on Duke's story, what do you think people need to know before adopting a dog?	



IVY'S STORY

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION GUIDE

Directions: Read *Ivy's Story*, then write your responses in the notes section. Use evidence and quotes from the text when appropriate.

Ivy's Story Questions

Notes

1. Why did Ivy end up at the shelter?	
2. What do you think the difference is between giving an animal away to someone on the street and adopting an animal from an animal shelter?	
3. What do you think Ivy meant when she said, "It was sad to see so many cats already waiting for homes when we arrived"?	
4. What steps can the guardian in the story take to prevent any more unwanted kittens from being born?	
5. Do you think it is important to prevent a companion cat or dog from having puppies or kittens? Why or why not?	



FOREST'S STORY

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION GUIDE

Directions: Read *Forest's Story*, then write your responses in the notes section. Use evidence and quotes from the text when appropriate.

Forest's Story Questions

Notes

1. What is a puppy mill?	
2. Compare the daughter in the story to her father. Why do you think she didn't like her father's business?	
3. Identify three challenges that Forest has experienced in his life.	
4. What do you think will happen if pet stores do not make money from selling puppies?	
5. If you wanted to have a dog companion, where would you go? Please explain your answer.	