

CANINE COMPANIONS
LESSON 1: Grades 4-6
ARE YOU READY FOR A DOG?

Show-Me Standards: Academic Goals: 1.2, 1.3, 1.8, 4.1, 4.2
Knowledge Goals: Communication Arts: 6; Science: 3

Objective: To introduce students to the concept that the decision to adopt a pet is not something to enter into lightly and to teach them that getting a pet is a long-term commitment.

Materials:

- Stuffed Puppy
- Paper or poster board
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- “Pets are for Life” handout

Method: Introduce the lesson by asking students to review what the word “responsible” means. It means to be depended on, to be reliable, to be held accountable for the care of someone or something. To be a good pet owner, you must be responsible. It is important to know that your responsibilities as a pet owner begin before you even have a pet! You must be responsible for knowing if you are ready to make a pet a part of your family; and if so, for selecting the “right” pet for you and your family.

Dogs make wonderful family pets. They are loving and loyal animals. They can be an endless source of fun and friendship for you and your family. But, they’re also a BIG responsibility. A dog relies on you for everything – his food, water, shelter, exercise, grooming, companionship, training, veterinary care and protection. Know what you are getting into.

Before you get a puppy or dog, stop and consider:

- 1) Time: How much time do you and your family have each day to devote to a pet? Dogs require about 2-4 hours of care each day. Puppies require more work than adults.
- 2) Human Medical Issues: Are there any allergies or medical conditions in your family that a pet may aggravate? Consult a doctor before considering a pet.
- 3) Cost: Can your family afford a pet? First year costs for a new dog or puppy average anywhere from \$750-\$1,500 depending on the size. Expenses don’t stop there. Dogs live 10-15 years.
- 4) Housing: Can you properly house the dog? Will your landlord allow you to have pets? If so, is there a size limit or additional deposit? If you cannot make a dog a family member by allowing him to live inside and have plenty of exercise outside in a safely fenced area, reconsider. Dogs are social animals that don’t want to live outside chained and alone. It is cruel to banish a dog to the back yard with little more than a dog house, food, and water.
- 5) Lifestyle: What kind of life do you and your family have? Are you an active family that spends a lot of time outdoors? Are you a more sedentary family that prefers to stay indoors to read and watch television? You need to find a breed that fits your lifestyle. Some breeds need lots of exercise daily; others do okay with one half hour walk. If dogs don’t get the exercise they need, they may develop behavioral problems.

- 6) **Grooming:** All dogs need grooming. This includes brushing hair, trimming the nails, cleaning teeth, and cleaning ears. Some dogs may require regular trips to a professional groomer. Will your family mind dog hair on the sofa and floor?
- 7) **Need:** Why do you want a dog? For companionship, to participate in sports, protection, or hunting? What is the “right” reason to get a pet? Research different breeds.
- 8) **Experience:** Are you an experienced dog owner or are you a beginner? Some breeds may be more challenging for a beginner. A popular breed may not be the one for you.
- 9) **Long Term Commitment:** Are you ready to care for a pet for 12-20 years? That is the average length of a dog’s life. Is your family prepared to make a commitment to a dog even through changes such as moving or a new baby? Will you care for your dog as she ages? Just like people, dogs can develop more health problems with age.
- 10) **Where to Find Your Dream Dog:** Your local animal shelter, animal control, or rescue group is the ideal place to look for a pet. You can save a life by adopting a dog (or cat). If you’re looking for a certain breed, approximately 1/3 of all shelter animals are purebred. Shelters also offer adoption counseling to ensure you find just the perfect match. Adoption fees often include the things your dog needs to get a good start in his or her new life – shots, spay/neuter surgery, and a health guarantee.

Distribute the “Pets are for Life” handout for review.

Call to Action: Pretend to adopt a classroom (stuffed) puppy for one week. Read about different breeds to determine which would be most suitable. What type of puppy did you select? Why? In real life, would a puppy be a good classroom pet? Why?

Create a chart to assign care duties to individual students or teams of students such as feeding, watering, walking, cleaning up accidents, crate training, cuddling, grooming, and going to the vet.

Related Reading: Visit our section entitled *Recommended Children’s Literature* for a comprehensive listing of animal-related books.

Web sites: Visit our section entitled *Recommended Web Links* for animal-related web sites.

Teacher's box: Use this matching and math worksheet to help students understand that the pet we get today can be with us for a long time.

Name _____

Pets Are For Life

Have you ever thought about getting a pet? Pets need someone to feed and play with them every day. They need lots of love and attention, year after year. Pets can live a long time. They need someone who will take care of them for as long as they live. How many years can different pets live? To find out, trace a line from each animal to the correct set of numbers.

6-15 years

12-20 years

14-20 years

7-10 years

5-8 years

5-10 years

3-6 years

1-4 years

Extra credit: How old are you now? I am _____ years old. Choose a pet on this page.

Write the animal's name here. _____ How old will you be when that animal is very old? Add your age to the highest age of that animal.

My age + highest age of animal = (Use a calculator if you wish.)