

Service Learning Pet Project

This service-learning idea is the result of a collaboration between Michelle Pierro (a kindergarten teacher and service-learning expert in New Jersey), Carolyn Poole (Westwood's 2008 Teacher of the Year), Westwood students, and our Character Crew:

Westwood students voted to help animals for our spring 2009 service project. Upon looking at our TEKS, it was discovered that this service projects directly falls within our standards.

Kindergarten: Identify basic needs of living organisms; give examples of how basic needs depend on each other.

First Grade: Observe and describe parts of animals, identify characteristics of living organisms that allow their basic needs to be met, compare and give examples of ways living organisms depend on each other for their basic needs.

Second Grade: Identify characteristics of living organisms, identify the external characteristics of different kinds of animals that allow their basic needs to be met, compare and give examples of ways living organisms depend on each other and on their environment.

Third Grade: Observe and describe the habitat of organisms, describe environmental changes in which some organisms would thrive, become ill, or perish.

All grade levels - Responsibility Pillar

It would be great to help students form a connection between this service project and their academic expectations. Most students don't realize that we have many animals in our city that have basic needs that are not met. The animals depend on us for survival. Students love animals and how wonderful to empower them at this age to make a difference. To help students become responsible pet owners, understand animal needs, and to help the stray animal population in our area, we have asked several animal groups to form a partnership. Currently two service organizations, The Houston Collie Rescue and Second Chance Pets in League City, have agreed to send volunteers and needy animals to our school. We will schedule an animal to

visit your class. You'll need to check on pet allergies. The volunteer that brings the animal will discuss the needs of the pet, responsible pet ownership, safety around animals, and ways that students can help. They will leave a poster with a picture of your "class pet" (an animal in the community that needs help) and hope that your class can participate in a pet donation drive.

Not only do animals rely on us, but we also rely on them. There are many ways in which an animal can serve, hence the nickname man's best friend. Sadie, a trained reading dog, often visits our small group counseling classes. Our Friendswood Police has a K-9 unit. People who have sight impairments use seeing-eye dogs. Horses are being used as therapy animals. Brainstorm ways in which animals work for and with us with your class. This piece can serve as a nice parallel between our character education efforts - specifically our responsibility pillar - and these animals. What is their responsibility toward us? What is ours toward them?

We will provide a letter explaining our spring project and the needs of animals in our community (leashes to keep them safe from cars, food, flea control, etc.) Below are many ideas that can help students extend their learning. A packet of additional activities can be downloaded at www.akc.org in the kids/juniors section. Additionally, students will watch two movies on responsible pet ownership during lunch.

Extension Ideas:

1. Students can collect data and chart their findings on the different breeds of dogs they know or would like to know more about, perhaps their adopted "class pet." Students could also conduct an independent research project on the domesticated animal of their choice.
2. Students can find or illustrate different pictures of dogs and cats. Students can then identify the different needs of the animals. For example, larger dogs need room to run, require more food, etc. This can be a class activity as well. All students that have pets can bring a picture and as a class compare and contrast needs through a venn diagram.
3. An animal care diary -- Students can create an animal care book for their "class pet." They can include a picture of the animals, the animals breed or name, what the animal likes to eat, games they like to play, when and where

the animal needs to be fed, what other special needs the breed might have.

4. The cost of friendship -- Students can use food brochures to find the cost of pet food. They can discuss how much an animal needs to eat in a year and multiply to see how much food they will need to buy and the corresponding cost to feed an animal for a year.

5. Drawing a Wanted Poster with animal needs around the picture (idea web). Students in the younger grades can use their idea web to write sentences to their parents and the community teaching them about their "class pet."

6. Students can write a persuasive letter to the community to persuade someone to adopt their pet. The persuasive letter could also be addressed to an animal trainer for their time to train stray animals. Well-behaved pets are easier to adopt!

7. There are so many good books on animals, including storybooks, books about dogs that help people, learning letters with dogs, and reference books. Check your school library or the city library for reading materials that you could use.

8. Give students dilemmas to chew on like the following, adapted from a Barbara Lewis book: Jimmy notices that the dog next door is always barking and seems to be hungry. He assumes that his neighbor is not a good pet owner, so he sneaks over the fence and lets the dog loose. Is this the act of a good citizen? Why or why not? What would you have done if you were Jimmy?