

Part 2: ‘Practicing Empathy’ Activity

Introduction

Some people think of animals as their best friends. Others think of them as scary. And some hardly think of them at all! But all animals—from the biggest elephant roaming the plains of Africa to the tiniest little fish in the deep blue sea—are living, feeling beings, just like us. We can learn more about animals’ lives by having empathy toward them—in other words, by putting ourselves in their place to understand how they feel.

Procedure

As a class, brainstorm a list of words used to describe feelings and write them on chart paper. Give an index card to each student. Read the first scenario below and have students write down one to three words that describe how the dog would feel in that situation. Then, collect all the cards, shuffle them, and redistribute them to the students. In small groups, have the students read out the emotions listed on their cards and discuss possible ways the animal may have come to be in that situation. Distribute another index card to each student, and continue with the same procedure for the next two scenarios.

Scenario #1: A dog who is always chained up outside feels ...

Scenario #2: An orca who is forced to do tricks and swim in circles over and over again in a tank at a marine park feels ...

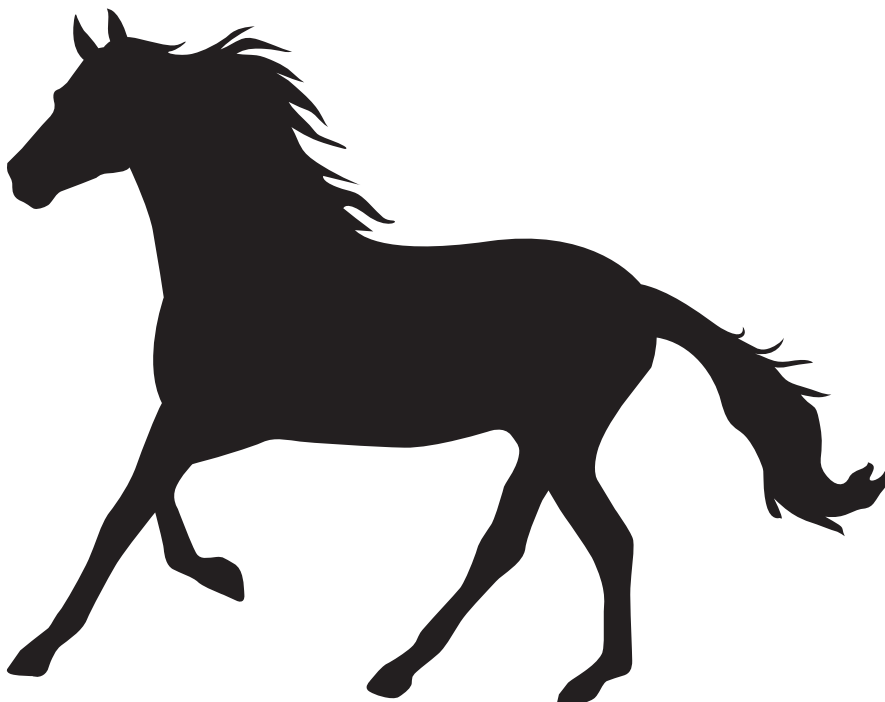
Scenario #3: A mother cow on a dairy farm whose baby is taken away from her feels ...

Common Core Supplemental Activity

In order to understand how an animal feels, we need to make inferences based on clues or evidence from the situation and how we would feel in the animal’s place. Have students read this passage from Anna Sewell’s classic novel *Black Beauty: The Autobiography of a Horse*. In it, a horse named Ginger tells Black Beauty about her experience with humans.



The man that had the care of us never gave me a kind word in my life. I do not mean that he ill-used me, but he did not care for us one bit further than to see that we had plenty to eat and shelter from storms and cold in the winter. ...[V]ery often the great boys passing through [our field] would fling stones to make us gallop. I was never hit, but one fine young colt was badly cut in the face ... we settled it in our minds that boys were our enemies. We had very good fun in the free meadows, galloping up and down and chasing each other round and round But when it came to breaking in, that was a bad time for me. Some men came to catch me, and ... caught me by the nose and held it so tight I could hardly draw my breath ... and so by force they got on the halter and the bar into my mouth. Then one man dragged me along by the halter, another flogging behind, and this was the first experience I had of men’s kindness I ... had a great deal of spirit ... it was dreadful to be shut up in a stall day after day instead of having my liberty, and I fretted and pined and wanted to get loose.



Part 2: ‘Practicing Empathy’ Activity (cont’d)

Then, have students practice inferential thinking by responding to the following questions. Select an inferencing graphic organizer to help students organize their ideas. They should cite textual evidence and then add that to the way they would feel in the animal’s place in order to make an inference.

Inferential Questions

1. How do the humans in the story treat horses? Why do you think they treated horses this way?
2. How do you think Ginger feels about humans? What makes you think so?

Common Core Standards Addressed

RL.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

RL.4.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL.5.1: Quote accurately from a text when explaining what it says explicitly and when drawing inferences from it.

SL.3–5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Part 3: ‘I Am an Animal’ Activity

Introduction

Humans and other animals are alike in many ways—including the ability to feel sadness and experience pain and suffering. We can include animals in our circle of compassion and allow empathy—putting ourselves in their place—to guide our interactions with them.

Procedure

Display the “Bullies Are Just Cowards” poster (which can be accessed online at SharetheWorld.org/AntiBullyPoster) with the text below the image covered so that students can see only the image. In small groups, have students discuss the following questions:

- What is happening in the photo, and what message do the words convey?
- How do you think the dog feels?
- Has anyone ever said these things to you?
- If so, how did it make you feel? If not, how would you feel if someone said these things to you?

Common Core Supplemental Activity

Since the “I Am an Animal” activity will most likely provoke strong opinions about the way animals and others should be treated, it can be a springboard for opinion writing. Have students use the writing prompt below to create an opinion piece.

Opinion Writing Prompt

“Imagine that you’re a nonhuman animal. How should you be treated by humans? Support your point of view with reasons. Consider how you would feel if you were this animal as well as what you would be afraid of, enjoy, and want in life, and choose three things that you might wish for.”

Here are some options for mini-lessons to target specific skills and help students develop their writing:

- Craft an introduction. (Grab your reader’s attention.)
- Distinguish facts from opinions. (Find animal facts at PETAkids.com.)
- Use linking words and phrases. (Connect your opinions to your reasons.)
- Provide a concluding statement. (Restate your opinion, and deliver a call to action to help the animal.)

Common Core Standards Addressed

W.3.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

W.4–5.1: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

SL.3–5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

