

How to Speak Cat/Dog

Suggested Grade Level: fourth-sixth grade

Character: Respect, Kindness

Relative Subject(s): Language Arts

Objective: To interpret feline and canine verbal and non-verbal communication and to understand warning signs to avoid being bitten or scratched.

Materials:

"What is This Cat Telling You?" handout

"All Dogs Can Bite" handout

Pencils

Paper or poster board

Crayons, colored pencils, markers

"Be Kind to All Pets" color sheet

Method: Today we're going to learn how cats and dogs talk to us. Learning what cats and dogs are "saying" is important. It can help us understand how they are feeling. It can also help us predict their behavior. Your cat or dog is talking all the time. Are you ready to learn this fascinating language?

Ask the children how they let others know what they are thinking or feeling. Usual responses include talking, writing, and sign language. Believe it or not, animals and people have very similar ways of expressing their thoughts and feelings.

Speaking

Can cats or dogs speak the way we do using words? No! But they can speak using sounds. Most cats and dogs can make at least 16 different sounds! What are some sounds cats and dogs make? Ask students to practice a meow, purr, growl, bark, and hiss. What is the meaning of each of these sounds? A purr usually means "I'm happy and relaxed." A cats and dogs can use several different meows and whimpers to make commands ("Feed me!"), make a request ("Please pet me."), and make a complaint ("I accidentally got locked in the closet – I don't like it in here!"). Cats and dogs use the growl and the hiss as warning signals to tell cats, dogs, and people to stay away or back off. If a cat or dog growls or hisses at you, leave them alone or a bite or scratch may follow.

Body talk

Cats and dogs also use their bodies to express themselves. people talk with their bodies, too. For example, if I shrug my shoulders, what does that mean? It usually means, "I don't know." Choose a few volunteers to act out different emotions using only their bodies. Show how we look when we are happy, mad, sad, and surprised. Ask the rest of the class to guess what emotion the actor is expressing.

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Felines and canines use their rears, tails, eyes, and body posture (the way they stand, sit, or lay) to "talk." Most of the time they use their bodies and sounds together to tell you something.

Distribute the "What is This Cat/Dog Telling You?" handout to each student. As a class, look at each picture. Examine and discuss what is happening in each picture. Think about:

1. The body language – look at each part of the body and what it's doing
2. What sound they might make.
3. What they are feeling.
4. If the cat/dog is safe to approach, touch, and/or pet. Why or why not?

Next, write a simple sentence under each picture to describe each cat. After completing the handout, look at the "Answer Sheet." Are you fluent in cat/dog? The more you understand something, the more you appreciate it. Cats and dogs are wonderful creatures when you get to know them. Take a few minutes every day to talk to your cat or dog!

A few more tips to stay safe with cats and dogs

Do you have a cat or dog at home or regularly visit with a neighbor's, friend's or relative's cat? If you spend time with cats, you should know that there are some things that may upset cats or dogs and cause them to bite or scratch. Remember, how you act determines a cat or dog's reaction.

*Make your pet a part of the family. A cat and dog who receives little attention from people is more likely to bite or scratch. So spend some time with your pet each day playing gently or relaxing together.

*Leave your pet alone when they are eating

*Leave your pet alone when they are sleeping. Pets need some alone time each day. Put a special bed in a quiet corner of the house. Remember, cats sleep an average of 16 hours a day.

*Ask your mom or dad to keep your pet healthy. Take your pet to the veterinarian every year for a check-up and shots. If a pet is sick or in pain, they may bite or scratch.

*Always ask the owner's permission before petting a cat or dog.

*Most importantly, treat your pet and all animals with kindness and respect. Never pull a pet's hair, tail, or ears. Don't bite, kick, or hit a pet. Don't chase, tease, or play rough games with pets.

Let's practice treating pets gently. Using stuffed animals, demonstrate to students how to pet and touch animals. Remind them that our pets at home aren't like stuffed animals at all they have feelings and will hurt just like we would if we were kicked, hit or tugged on. Allow students time to practice stroking and touching the stuffed animals. This is a good

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time to talk to them about using quiet, inside voices when around pets. Explain that pets may become upset or frightened if the children yell and scream around them.

Distribute the "Be Kind to All Pets" color sheet to reinforce this lesson.
Another option would be to ask students

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Information adapted from the Humane Society of Missouri

Answer Sheet

1

Ears are alert.
Eyes are wide open.
Body is straight, upright.
Tail is relaxed.

This cat is happy. "I trust you and am ready for attention." A safe cat to pet.

2

Ears are straight up.
Eyes are closed.
Body is relaxed.
Tail is relaxed.

This cat feels safe and happy. Cats must trust you before sleeping in your presence. Don't surprise a sleeping cat.

3

Ears are slightly back.
Body is crouched.
Tail is slightly twitching.
Pupils are dilated.

This cat is playful. "Let's have some fun!" He is ready to pounce, so approach with some caution.

4

Ears are down and back.
Hair is erect.
Mouth is open and hissing.
Body is crouched.
Tail is twitching quickly and is "puffed up."
Pupils are fully dilated.

This cat is ready to defend himself! "Don't touch me or I may bite or scratch!" Leave this cat alone.

What is This Cat Telling You?

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1



2



3



4



All Dogs Can Bite

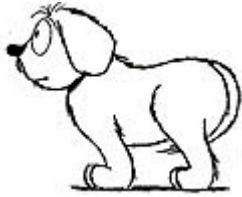
Information provided by: <http://loveyourdog.com>
(Teacher Copy)

Under the right condition, any dog will bite!

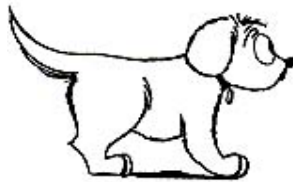
It is important to recognize a dog's 'body language'. Body language is the way a dog's body looks and acts. Just like you can look at your mom or dad and know when you are in trouble without them saying a word. Understanding body language will help protect you.

Here are examples of different body language:

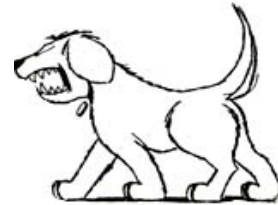
Remember, all of dogs could bite!



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This dog is aggressive.



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Take a good look at these dogs and remember that if pushed, they will bite. Be sure to notice their tails and the expressions on their faces. Which dog do you think is the most dangerous? The dog that is afraid is the most dangerous.

Even happy and playful dogs can bite. Play bites hurt as much as real bites. If the dog does not belong to you, please respect his/her space and leave him/her alone.

Don't leave babies alone with dogs. Although your dog may be friendly, don't ever leave a baby alone with him/her. If you have a younger brother or sister, please stay in the room if your parents are not there. Small children don't understand what dogs are trying to say. While your dog may be saying, "leave me alone" your little brother or sister may keep bothering them. Then your dog may bite to get your little brother or sister to leave them alone.

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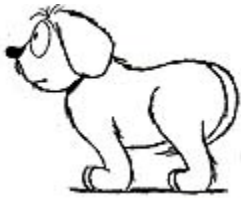
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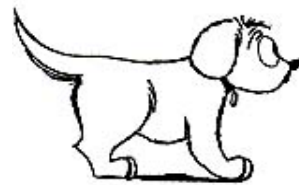
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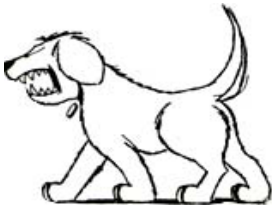
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Directions: Below each picture write what you think the dog is saying. Remember, all of dogs could bite!











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Be Kind to All Pets



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