

Why Do Cats Do That?

Suggested Grade Levels: K-6

Subject: Language Arts

Character: Kindness/Empathy

Materials and technology to be used:

- “Cats – True or False?” quiz – **x1 per student**
- Whiteboard/markers or chalkboard – **x1**
- Sticky Notes – **x3 per student**
- Pencils – **x1 per student**
- Individual whiteboards/markers or True/False paddles (may use optional “True and False Template”) – **x1 per student**

Objective(s):

This lesson will provide students with real answers to the curious traits, behaviors, languages, characteristics, and genetics of cats.

Anticipatory Set/Hook:

Arrange the students’ desks in a large circle, or simply ensure that there is enough room that all students can be facing each other. Leave an area in the center of the students open and clear. Pose a thought for students to ponder: “Have you ever wondered why cats do the things they do? What could they be thinking? What are they saying when they knead you with their paws? Why do some have short hair and some long hair? Why do they look the way they do?” Tell students that today they are going to explore why cats do the things that they do.

Lesson Beginning:

1. Tell students that each cat has a unique personality, one of a kind. I.e.. One cat likes to cuddle while the other likes to be left alone to explore. Another cat may let you pick them up while the other hisses and swats if you touch their back.
 - Ask: “What makes each cat different?” Have students discuss this very broad question with a partner or small group. Call on volunteers to share with the whole class. There will be numerous different answers, and most will probably be correct.
2. To explore the concept above, tell students that they are going to think about five questions: “Why do cats have whiskers?”, “Why do cats purr?”, “Why do cats sleep so much?”, “Why do cats ‘make biscuits’ or knead?” and “Why do cats spend so much time grooming?”. You may wish to write these questions on the board. Perhaps only choose two to three questions for younger students.

3. Pass out three sticky notes to each student. Have each student respond to three questions on a sticky note, no need for names. If they do not have an answer, ask them to just write down any thoughts on the topic that they may have. Have students stick their notes in the corresponding columns on the board. Remove the stickies and read the thoughts out loud. Discuss.

Why do cats have whiskers? What do they use them for?

Whiskers are long, thin hairs on a cat's face. Whiskers, like hair and nails, do fall out and are replaced. You will notice that cats also have long "whisker-like" hairs on their cheeks, above their eyebrows, on their chin, and on the back of their front legs. Whiskers really serve three purposes:

1. Whiskers help a cat feel his way around.
2. Whiskers help us know how a cat is feeling. When a cat is mad, he will pull his whiskers back. When a cat is happy, the whiskers will be relaxed and pushed forward.
3. Whiskers are used most of all to help a cat know if he will fit through openings. A cat's whiskers are about the width of his body, sort of a natural ruler. A cat will stick his head in and out of an opening before he puts his body in. If his whiskers do not fit, the rest of him will not either! So, do not ever break your cat's "ruler" by cutting or trimming his whiskers!

Why do cats purr?

Have you heard a cat purr? It sounds like a low, rattling hum. Cats show they are happy by purring. Humans smile and laugh, dogs wag their tails, but cats purr to show contentment. Sometimes cats also purr to help calm themselves if something upsets them (like a trip to the vet). How does a cat purr? No one is really sure. It is a wonderful mystery. Some feline experts believe that this sound is caused by vibrating muscles surrounding the larynx. Stimulation of a specific area in the cat's brain causes cats to begin purring.

Why do cats sleep so much?

Cats sleep an average of 16 hours a day! Normal cats sleep two-thirds of their life away. They spend about twice as much time sleeping as most other animals. The amount of time a cat spends sleeping can depend on age, weather, temperature, hunger, and sense of security. Experts are unsure why cats sleep so much. Wild cats live the same sort of life – long naps interrupted by searches for food. Domestic housecats apparently saw no reason to change this way of life. Some people believe their sleeping routine is related to the fact that they like to be alone. They do not read or watch TV, so they do the next best thing, they sleep! So, snuggle in next to one the next time you want to take a catnap. Cats are nocturnal (active at night rather than by day) and usually like to visit and play with their human family at night. This is the main time when kitty gets to see the family, who is finally home from work and school. Play with your cat a few minutes every night before going to bed, so they won't keep you up until the wee hours with silly antics!

Why do cats “make biscuits” or knead?

If your cats make biscuits (pushes their paws in and out) on your arm, or kneads your belly, they are showing you how much they love you. As a kitten, they moved their paws against their mother’s belly to stimulate the flow of warm milk. Most cats continue to knead throughout their lives, especially during times of absolute safety and contentment. You have taken the place of your cat’s mother as caretaker. Kneading is the nicest way for your cat to tell you how much they think of you.

Why do cats spend so much time grooming?

Cats are incredibly clean animals. For them, the saying “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” is definitely true! Cats spend one third of their waking hours grooming themselves. If a cat has licked you, you will know just how rough its tongue is. A cat’s tongue is covered by thousands of tiny barbs. These barbs allow kitty to groom itself, as well as lap water and lick up small pieces of food. Cats have a grooming routine that allow them to reach almost every part of their body with their tongue. Grooming keeps cats healthy. Grooming with a barbed tongue removes loose hair and parasites like fleas, stimulates the skin to encourage the growth of new hair, and helps regulate their body temperature through the cooling action of saliva. When cats lick themselves, the tongue grabs a lot of loose hair that gets ingested. This can lead to nasty hairballs. You can help the grooming routine by brushing kitty regularly and giving your cat hairball remedies.

4. Tell students that the fact is, you need to understand your cat to know why they behave a certain way. It is fun to figure out why cats do the things they do! **Reading books, talking to reputable experts, and looking up the heredity of your cat** (doing research!) will provide great insight into the behavior of your cat.

Middle of Lesson:

1. Have students take the “Cats – True or False?” quiz to find out even more answers to the curious things that cats do.
 - Tell students that the more they know about cats, the better they will understand their behavior and wonderful place in our lives!
2. This quiz can be taken individually or in a group, written, or verbally. If you chose to give the quiz “whole-group” style, you may wish to utilize individual white boards or True/False cards or paddles for your students. This will encourage participation and allow you to assess your students understanding.

See the attached template to use for True/False cards or paddles

3. Make sure students understand that they are going to get **some** of their questions answered about cats, but it is impossible to cover **all** of the questions that they may have.

They can always research further on their own.

End of Lesson:

1. Provide the quiz answers and discuss.
2. Ask students: "Which answers surprised you?" Turn and talk with a neighbor. Call on a few volunteers to share their thoughts.

Closure:

Engage students in a "Brainwriting" activity:

- Provide **1 minute** for students to reflect in their *brain* on what they learned today, and then **3 minutes** to *write* their thoughts down.
- Have students write down any remaining questions that they may still have about why cats act the way that they do. Pull one question each week for a special "Cat Trivia" question of the week.

Extension:

1. "Cat Trivia" can be played with the whole school! Post the question outside of your classroom and give all students in the school a chance to answer. Hang an envelope or place a basket under the question to gather answers. At the beginning of the next week, announce the winner of each question. This activity will help teach other students about the wonderful world of cats!
2. Have students take the "Cats – True or False?" quiz home. Give the quiz to family members. How many did they get right?

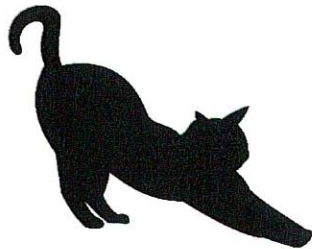


Cats – True or False?

Quiz

1. A cat can get plenty of exercise indoors and is usually safer there than outside. **T OR F**
2. Cats need and sometimes even enjoy occasional brushing, which removes dead hair and keeps their skin clean and healthy. **T OR F**
3. Homeless cats live in constant danger and can be easily killed by cars, dogs, poison, thirst, or starvation. **T OR F**
4. The darker color on cat ears, faces, paws and tail develop later in life. **T OR F**
5. Use two hands to support the cat's body, holding it close to you. **T OR F**
6. Whiskers are very sensitive and act as "feelers" to let the cat know when it is about to brush against something. **T OR F**
7. Cats see more colors than dogs. **T OR F**
8. Cats do not need that much water since they sleep most of the day. **T OR F**
9. Even if my cat were able to catch enough mice to live on, it would not be a balanced diet. **T OR F**
10. Cats cannot keep themselves clean by just licking their fur with their tongues. They need help from humans. **T OR F**
11. Spaying or Neutering your cat will make them fat and lazy. **T OR F**
12. Cats need two to four times as much protein as dogs. **T OR F**
13. Cats usually eat grass just because they like the taste. **T OR F**
14. Though cats can sometimes twist around in mid-air and land safely, they can still be easily injured by any sort of fall. **T OR F**
15. Since cats need more protein than dogs, dog food is not adequate for them. **T OR F**
16. Drooling at the mouth usually indicates indigestion or other illness. **T OR F**

17. It is alright to feed your cat a diet of just fish. They love it! **T OR F**
18. A fast-swishing tail indicates anger or annoyance. Tail straight up expresses pride or contentment. Tail curled around the body indicates fear or insecurity. **T OR F**
19. A cat always keeps its claws retracted when it walks. This cuts down on wear and tear of the claws and ensures that they retain their sharpness. It also means that cats can walk very quietly, the better to sneak up on their prey. **T OR F**
20. Although some cats enjoy milk, it is not a necessary part of the diet, and many adult cats are made sick by it. Milk is not a substitute for water. **T OR F**
21. Cats can see better in the dark than many other animals but cannot see in total darkness. **T OR F**
22. There are 15 muscles in a cat's ears that enable them to twitch or flatten back against the head. **T OR F**
23. Some cats can have extra toes. **T OR F**
24. Yarn makes an excellent toy for cats/kittens. **T OR F**
25. Due to genetics, cats are born with a lot of different eye colors. **T OR F**



Cats – True or False?

Quiz

Answer Key

1. **A cat can get plenty of exercise indoors and is usually safer there than outside. TRUE**
2. **Cats need, and sometimes even enjoy, occasional brushing which removes dead hair and keeps their skin clean and healthy. TRUE**
3. **Homeless cats live in constant danger and can be easily killed by cars, dogs, poison, thirst, or starvation. TRUE**
4. **The darker color on cat ears, faces, paws, and tail develop later in life. TRUE**
5. **Use two hands to support the cat's body, holding it close to you. FALSE**
6. **Whiskers are very sensitive and act as "feelers" to let the cat know when it is about to brush against something. TRUE**
7. **Cats see more colors than dogs. FALSE**

Cats do not typically enjoy being held. Leave them alone and they will stay where they feel safest.

8. **Cats do not need that much water since they sleep most of the day. FALSE**
9. **Even if my cat were able to catch enough mice to live on, it would not be a balanced diet. FALSE**

Always keep a full bowl of fresh water for your cat. Cats need fresh drinking water every day for optimum health. Water is essential for helping the kidneys flush out toxins from the blood. Water also helps keep other organ tissues hydrated and healthy.

A cat who is an especially good hunter may well be able to survive on prey alone. However, a conscious cat owner should monitor this closely and offer an alternative cat food just in case. In addition, mice carry numerous diseases and may pose a threat to the cat's health in other ways besides diet.

10. **Cats cannot keep themselves clean by just licking their fur with their tongues. They need help from humans. FALSE**

Regular brushing of your cat will aid in their grooming, help remove loose hairs, and prevent hairballs, but is not necessary. However, longer haired cats may need human assistance with grooming more often.

11. **Spaying or Neutering your cat will make them fat and lazy. FALSE**

These surgeries will not affect weight, overfeeding will! Spaying/Neutering is one of the most important surgeries that you should always have done for your cats and dogs. Not only does it help solve the pet overpopulation crisis, but it leads to a longer, happier, and healthier life for your pet. Spaying/neutering will also prevent certain forms of cancer and other health issues from developing in your pets.

12. **Cats need two to four times as much protein as dogs. TRUE**

That is why cat food from the pet store should be balanced with a higher protein content. Thus, it is extremely important that your dog does not eat your cat's food because of this! The high protein content can make a dog very sick.

13. **Cats usually eat grass just because they like the taste. FALSE**

As it stands, researchers have not agreed on one definitive reason why your cat enjoys a munch of your lawn. However, there are many theories why they may do this. The top three theories are as follows: it helps with an upset stomach, grass juice contains folic acid, and/or it works as a natural laxative.

14. **Though cats can sometimes twist around in mid-air and land safely, they can still be easily injured by any sort of fall. TRUE**

15. **Since cats need more protein than dogs, dog food is not adequate for them. TRUE**

16. **Drooling at the mouth usually indicates indigestion or other illness. FALSE**

Some of the harmless causes of drooling may be excitement or an increasing appetite. Cats may also drool when given cat nip or a bitter tasting medication.

17. **It is alright to feed your cat a diet of just fish. They love it! FALSE**

Like any other ingredient, fish should be given as part of a balanced diet. Fish is a great source of protein and supplies a good amount of protein that is very usable by cats' bodies. On the negative side, some kinds of fish can also destroy certain vitamins. So, feeding fish to cats is a bit of a science if nutritional balance is to be achieved.

18. **A fast-swishing tail indicates anger or annoyance. Tail straight up expresses pride or contentment. Tail curled around the body indicates fear or insecurity. TRUE**

19. **A cat always keeps its claws retracted when it walks. This cuts down on wear and tear of the claws and ensures that they retain their sharpness. It also means that cats can walk very quietly, the better to sneak up on their prey. TRUE**

20. **Although some cats enjoy milk, it is not a necessary part of the diet, and many adult cats are made sick by it. Milk is not a substitute for water. TRUE**

Most cats are lactose intolerant.

21. **Cats can see better in the dark than many other animals but cannot see in total darkness. TRUE**

The truth is that cats cannot see in absolute darkness any more than we can. However, they are much better adapted than humans for seeing in low levels of light. Cats can't see fine detail or rich color but have a superior ability to see in the dark because of the high number of rods in their retina that are sensitive to dim light. As a result, cats can see using roughly one-sixth the amount of light that people need.

22. **There are 15 muscles in a cat's ears that enable them to twitch or flatten back against the head. FALSE**

There are 32 muscles in each cat's ear.

23. **Some cats can have extra toes. TRUE**

This is called a polydactyl cat. It is especially important that these cats receive regular nail trimmings so that their extra toes/nails do not curl around and grow into their feet.

24. **Yarn makes an excellent toy for cats/kittens. False**

Although cats or kittens may LOVE playing with a ball of yarn, they can easily get tangled in it and severely injured or evenstrangled. Yarn also frays and may get stuck to claws or be too tempting to eat. Yarn is not a safe toy.

25. **Due to genetics, cats are born with a lot of different eye colors. FALSE**

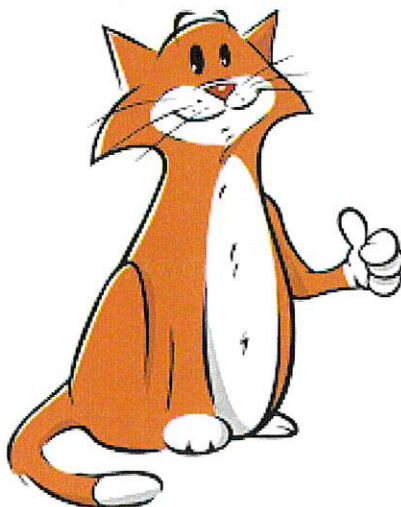
All kittens are born with blue eyes. The darker pigments such as green, blue/green, gold, orange, and copper develop later as the cat matures.



NEBRASKA
HUMANE
SOCIETY

Where help becomes hope.

TRUE



FALSE

