

Telling Humane Tales

Suggested Grade Level: High School

Relative Subject(s): Social Studies

OBJECTIVE

To understand and be able to distinguish humane themes found in children's literature. Students will also create their own stories, using humane themes.

MATERIALS

- Picture books (listed below)
- Materials for making books
- Copies of Humane Education Guidelines for Children's Literature

ACTIVITY

Preliminary Discussion

- What does it mean to be humane?
- Can books have humane messages about human/animal interactions? Think of an example.
- Can books have irresponsible and negative portrayals of human/animal interactions? Think of an example.
- How do books shape our opinions and attitudes? Think of an example of a book that changed your opinion or attitude about an issue.

Procedure

Visit the library and check out enough children's picture books for the whole class. The books should have pictures of animal and/or human interactions depicted in them. Be sure to get a mix of both positive and negative interactions and messages.

Here are some examples:

- *Alejandro's Gift*, by Richard Albert
- *Annie and the Wild Animals*, by Jan Brett
- *Cross-Country Cat*, by Mary Calhoun
- *First Dog*, by Jan Brett
- *Floss*, by Kim Lewis
- *Good Dog Carl*, by Alexandra Day
- *Scruffy*, by Peggy Parish
- *Tikvah Means Hope*, by Patricia Polacco
- *Officer Buckle and Gloria*, by Peggy Rathmann
- *Jaeger Finds a Family*, by Jennifer Seidel
- *Chester the Out of Work Dog*, Marilyn Singer

Discuss the "Humane Education Guidelines for Children's Literature". Each student should read one of the books. When everyone is finished reading, each student should critique their book and discuss what messages they felt were being sent.

Students will be asked to create their own books with humane themes. Following are some examples of basic themes the students can use to create their stories:

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- A child wants to adopt a pet. How does the family decide what to do? Who is responsible for the pet? What are the needs of the pet?
- A family lives in the mountains, surrounded by wildlife. How do they coexist peacefully with the wildlife?
- A pet becomes lost from its home. What actions does its family take to find it? How do the pet's collar, tags and microchip implant help to reunite the pet with its owner?
- Adults who model humane treatment of all people, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation and all animals and insects, regardless of certain negative stereotypes that exist (i.e. sharks, spiders, rats).
- Homeless or lost animals are rescued by kind people who take them to their local animal shelter. What kinds of services does the animal shelter provide? Were they able to reunite the pet with its owner? Were they able to adopt the pet to a new, loving family?
- A cat lives inside with its family, rather than being allowed to roam outside. What does the family do to keep the cat happy and content inside their home?

Using materials to create an authentic book, the students will tell their stories with text and pictures. Once their books are finished, they should visit an elementary school classroom and read their stories to the students to teach them about the humane messages their books portray.

Post-Discussion

- Why are some animal-related books considered inappropriate because of the messages being sent?
- Should books be supervised by parents and teachers? Why? Why not?
- Think about the literature available for people your age. What kinds of messages are being sent? Think of various examples.
- Can we also receive messages and ideas from other types of media, including newspapers, magazines, television and movies?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Meet with a group of elementary school teachers to discuss the elementary books the students have critiqued and "teach" the teachers about humane education guidelines to literature.

Humane Education Guidelines for Children's Literature

There are numerous children's books with animal themes. As educators, we must be able to discern which books have appropriate and humane messages and which ones have irresponsible and negative portrayals of human/animal interactions.

BEWARE OF...

- 🐾 Dogs and/or cats running at large with no one to supervise them.

- 🐾 Dogs and/or cats not wearing collars and tags.

- 🐾 Cats that are allowed to roam free (this can cause cat fights, killing of wildlife, and injury to the cat).

- 🐾 Procreation of puppies and kittens.

- 🐾 Children feeding or interacting with wildlife.

- 🐾 Children buying or adopting pets on their own (adults are not mentioned in the story).

- 🐾 Over-exaggerating animal behavior (i.e. a young puppy running through the neighborhood with the kids as they play).

- 🐾 Stories where no humans are mentioned and dogs and cats are surviving on their own (the message says it's okay to be a stray).

- 🐾 Disregard for or mistreatment of any type of creature, whether it's a spider or an elephant (sends the message that these animals or insects aren't important and it's okay to treat them poorly).

REAL LIFE VS. FANTASY

An example of this type of book is the *Carl the Dog* series. These books feature a very realistic looking Rottweiler doing unrealistic things like caring for a child without adult supervision and performing tasks that dogs cannot realistically perform.

VS.

The *Berenstein Bears* books where cartoon animals are wearing clothing and walking on their back legs. These books portray unrealistic animals doing unrealistic things, which is obviously fantasy.

The difference between these types of stories can be confusing to children, so we must help them understand the distinction between the two.

Do books get discussed at school or at home? Will children expect their own pets to do unrealistic tasks?

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