

## WHY DO CATS DO THAT?

Suggested Grade Level: Kindergarten-3

Character: Kindness

Relative Subject(s): Language Arts

**Objective:** To provide children with real answers to the curious things cats do.

**Materials:**

☺ “Cats – True or False?” quiz

**Method:** Have you ever wondered why cats do the things they do? If you have a cat, you’ve probably been curious about them. Today we’re going to get some real answers to some of the questions children usually have about cats.

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

Whiskers are the long, thick hairs on a cat’s face. Whiskers, like hair and nails, do fall out and are replaced. You’ll 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’ll pull his whiskers back. When a cat is happy, the whiskers will be relaxed and pushed forward.
- 3) But, whiskers are used most of all to help a cat know if he’ll 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 don’t fit, the rest of him won’t either! So, don’t 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 veterinarian).

How does a cat purr? No one is really sure. Purring 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.

Even if we’re not sure how cats purr, we humans are just glad they can. There is nothing more relaxing than snuggling up next to a purring feline friend!

*Why do cats sleep so much?*

Cats sleep an average of 16 hours a day! Normal cats sleep 2/3’s of their life away. They spend about twice as much time sleeping as most other mammals. 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

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alone. They don't 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 she won't keep you up until the wee hours with silly antics!

*Why do cats "make biscuits" or knead?*

If your cat makes biscuits (pushes her paws in and out) on your arm, or kneads your belly, she is showing you how much she loves you. As a kitten, she moved her paws against her mother's belly to stimulate the flow of warm milk. Most cats continue to knead throughout their lives, during times of absolute safety and contentment. You have taken the place of her mother as caretaker. Kneading is the nicest way for your cat to tell you how much she thinks 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 1/3 of their waking hours grooming themselves.

If a cat has licked you, you'll know just how rough his tongue is. A cat's tongue is covered by thousands of tiny "barbs." These barbs allow kitty to groom himself, as well as lap water and lick up small pieces of food. Cats have a grooming routine that allows them to reach almost every part of their body with their tongue. Grooming keeps cats healthy. Cleaning with a barbed tongue removes loose hair and parasites like fleas; stimulates the skin to encourage the growth of new hair; and helps regulate her 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 hairball remedies.

What do you want to know about cats? Take the "Cat – True or False?" quiz to find out even more answers to the curious things cats do. The more you know about something the more you understand it! Learn all you can about your pets. You'll be amazed!

### **Call to Action:**

Post a cat question outside your room each day for a week. Give all students in the school a chance to answer. Hang an envelope under the question to gather answers. Remind students to play "Cat Trivia" each day during the morning announcements. At the beginning of the next week, announce the winner of each question during morning announcements. This activity will help teach other students about cats.

Take the "Cat – True or False?" quiz home. Give the quiz to family members. How many did they get right?

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## Cat True-False Quiz Answers

1. TRUE. A cat can get plenty of exercise indoors, and is usually safer there than outside.
2. FALSE. Cats need and enjoy occasional brushing, which removes dead hair and keeps the skin clean and healthy.
3. TRUE. Homeless cats live in constant danger and are usually soon killed by cars, dogs, poison, thirst or starvation.
4. TRUE. The dark color on ears, face, paws and tail develops later.
5. FALSE. Use two hands to support the cat's body, holding it close to you.
6. TRUE. They are very sensitive and act as "feelers" to let the cat know when it's about to brush against something.
7. TRUE. Cats see everything as black, gray or white.
8. FALSE. A cat will splinter and swallow the bone, which can easily kill it.
9. FALSE. All cats need water.
10. FALSE. Even if it were able to catch enough mice to live on, it would not be a balanced diet.
11. TRUE. They can usually keep themselves clean by licking their fur with their tongues.
12. TRUE. Cats need two to four times as much protein as dogs.
13. FALSE. Cats usually eat grass just because they like the taste, or because they need to throw up something they have swallowed. Grass will wrap around a sharp object in the cat's stomach, and protect the throat as the object is vomited.
14. FALSE. Though cats can sometimes twist around in mid-air and land safely, they are often hurt or killed by a fall.
15. TRUE. Since cats need more protein than dogs, dog food is not adequate for them.
16. FALSE. Foam around the mouth usually indicates indigestion or other illness.
17. FALSE. Too much fish will cause vitamin and thiamin deficiencies, which may cause convulsion, paralysis or death.
18. TRUE. A swishing tail indicates anger. Tail-up-straight expresses pride or contentment. Tail curled around the body indicates fear or insecurity.
19. FALSE. A cat keeps its claws retracted when it walks, so they do not appear in the pawprint.
20. FALSE. 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.
21. FALSE. They can see better in the dark than many other animals but cannot see in total darkness.
22. TRUE. The thirty muscles in the cat's ears enable them to twitch or flatten back against the head.
23. TRUE. Some cats, however, have extra toes.
24. TRUE. This is a serious disease, usually fatal.
25. FALSE. Although kittens enjoy playing with yarn balls, they can easily get tangled in the yarn and strangle to death.
26. FALSE. Spaying won't affect a cat's weight. Overfeeding will! Well-cared-for spayed cats stay slender and active.
27. FALSE. Dog flea spray contains toxic substances, which a cat will pick up as it licks it's fur, causing sickness or death. Cat flea spray is specially made not to harm cats if they like it off their fur.
28. TRUE. The gold, green or orange pigment develops later as the cat matures.

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29. TRUE. Although more independent than dogs and therefore less “trainable”, they can be taught to walk on a leash and do simple tricks. Training is most successful when begun at an early age.

30. FALSE. The white of a raw egg is harmful to cats. Cooked eggs are okay, and many cats enjoy them.