



Understanding Dog Language

Activity Overview and Objective

Students will be able to identify what pets or animals are “saying” by their behaviors in order to improve pet to human relationships. Students will be able to demonstrate how to properly greet a pet (owned) dog vs. what to do if approached by a stray dog.

Connections to Standards

Michigan Standards in English Language Arts

Reading: Foundational Skills:

RF 3.3, 4.3, 5.3: Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words

RF3-4, 4-4, 5-4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Writing:

W3-3, 4-3, 5-3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

Speaking & Listening:

SL3-1, 4-1, 5-1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade level topics and texts.

SL3-2, 4-2, 5-2: Determine the main ideas and supporting details of (3), paraphrase (4), or summarize (5) a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats

SL3-3, 4-3, 5-3: Ask and answer questions about information from a speaker, offering appropriate elaboration and detail (3). Identify reasons and evidence to support particular points (4). Summarize the points and explain how each is supported by reasons and evidence (5).

Language:

L3-1, 4-1, 5-1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

L3-2, 4-2, 5-2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

L3-3, 4-3, 5-3: Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

L3-4, 4-4, 5-4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning word and phrases based on grade-level content.

Lesson Overview

Activities

Choose the activities that best match the interest and needs of your students.

- ☞ Discuss Animal Language
- ☞ Identify Dog Language Shown in Slideshow
- ☞ Learn How to Greet an Owned Dog
- ☞ Learn What to Do When Approached By a Stray Dog
- ☞ Read About & Discuss Why Dogs Bite
- ☞ Dog Bite Prevention Pledge

Materials

Poster Paper, Markers

Stuffed dog, Dog Collar and Leash

Computer with Projector (or print-out of Powerpoint Slides and an Overhead Projector)

Worksheets: “Dog Speak”, “Why Dogs Bite”, and “Dog Bite Prevention Pledge”

Community Connection

- ◆ Invite a dog trainer to visit the classroom to speak about their experiences with dogs.
- ◆ Ask students who own dogs to bring in a picture of their pet. Ask students to identify what the dogs are communicating by their body language in each picture.



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Procedure

1. **Ask students to think about communication:** What types of things do we do to communicate with other people? Is there anything besides language that we use to communicate? (Facial gestures and body language.) Choose a few students to **demonstrate how they would express excitement, fear, or other emotions without using any words or sounds.**
2. **Explain that animals have their own types of language.** Although most cats and dogs can make at least 16 different vocal sounds, they also use their faces and bodies to express themselves like people do. **Ask students to name body parts that show how a pet is feeling** and to describe how those parts “talk”.
3. Pass out the “Dog Speak” worksheet. Explain that **students will be trying to determine what the dog in each slide show picture is trying to “say”.** Students will **study** each dog and **write** what these pets are saying through their actions, **using quotation marks to identify the dialogue.** After each slide (before revealing answers on next slide), ask students to share by **reading the dialogue they wrote** to interpret the body language of the dog.
 - **Discuss each slide, having students give examples,** if possible. Ask if their own dog or dog that they know has communicated in these ways, and ask for other examples of ways that they communicate.
4. Tell students that half of all children in the United States will be bitten by a dog before their 12th birthday. In order to help prevent a dog bite, **students will learn how to properly greet a dog.**
5. Bring in a large stuffed dog and put it in a visible spot in front of the students. Put a collar and leash on the dog and explain that this is a dog on a walk with its owner. **Explain the following steps to greet a dog, and have students demonstrate.** Elicit student input where appropriate.
 - a) **Ask the owner if you may pet the dog.** Some dogs are not nice, may not like children, or may be afraid. Never touch an unknown dog without permission first!
 - b) If the owner says it’s ok, let the dog smell you. Explain that this is a formal introduction to the dog, just like shaking hands for people. **Make a fist and allow the dog to smell the back of your fist.** This is for 2 reasons: The front of your hand smells like whatever you just ate; If the dog does try to nip, it will not hurt as much on your fist as on your fingertips.
 - c) **Pet the dog on the chin or neck.** Ask students to put a hand on top of their head and one on their chest. Which hand can they see? If the dog is worried, he can always put his head down and smell you again to remind him of who you are.



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5.

Procedure

- d) Usually, if the dog is friendly, you can now **pet the dog on the head or the side**. Ask the owner if it's ok. NEVER pet a dog on the ears, the tail, or paws. (These are very sensitive areas on most dogs, and even the friendliest of dogs may bite or nip if these areas are touched.)
- 6. Next, explain that students will **learn what to do if they encounter a stray dog**. You may use the same dog and take his collar and leash off, or bring a second dog toy. **Ask students if you can tell if a dog is aggressive or not just by looking at it**. If it's "cute", does it mean it's nice? Most importantly, **NEVER approach** an unknown stray dog. Tell an adult about the dog so that they can call for help. (Usually Animal Control or Police Departments can help.) If the dog approaches you, follow these steps:
 - a) **Stand like a tree**. Put your hands to your sides, and stand still. If you are not active, you are likely not interesting, and that alone makes many dogs lose interest. **NEVER hit, kick, or otherwise try to hurt the dog**. This engages them, and may cause them to attack!
 - b) **Stand still**. Do not run away, or turn your back on a dog. This may trigger a dog's "chase" instinct.
 - c) **Avoid eye contact**. Explain that for people, making eye contact is polite. For dogs, it may be taken as a sign that you are trying to challenge them. Use your peripheral vision to stay aware of where the dog is, but do not look directly into their eyes.
 - d) **Distract the dog**. Use anything that you have– a hat, jacket, or even a backpack. **Throw the item** to the side, away from yourself. Wait to see if the dog goes after the item. (Remember, these are items that you may not want to lose, but they are all replaceable, and **it's much better to lose an item than to get hurt!**)
 - e) **Back away from the dog**. If the dog is still interested in you, slowly (with your face still toward the dog), walk backward until the dog loses interest, or until you can get to a safe place.
 - f) **If the dog does attack, curl into a ball**. **Protect your face, head, and neck**, and bring your knees up to your chest. **Stay as quiet and still as possible**, to avoid encouraging the dog any further.
- 6. Using chart paper, **list students' ideas** about why dogs bite. **Discuss** ways that these scenarios can be avoided. Pass out "Why Dogs Bite" page, and **read** them together as a class.
- 7. Pass out the "Dog Bite Prevention Pledge". **Read** through the behaviors together and have each student **sign** their copy. Students will take their papers home and **teach their family** about dog safety. Ask students to return signed pledges the next day, and **ask about conversations** students had with their families.