



Cats in the Community

CATBOY

AN INTERMEDIATE LEVEL NOVEL STUDY ON CATS IN THE COMMUNITY

BCSPCA

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Cats in the Community

Catboy: A Novel Study on Pet Overpopulation is one of four BC SPCA lessons in this series *Cats in the Community*

Catboy: A Novel Study on cats in the community is based on the novels *Catboy* and *Hunter* by Canadian author Eric Walters. Students will make connections to real situations in their community and think critically about the ideas and information presented to deepen and transform their understanding about community cats.

There are three other lessons:

Community Cats and the Ecosystem is a science lesson about the food chain, invasive species and the effects on the ecosystem.

Cat Math requires students to use multiplication, estimation and graphing skills to calculate the numbers of cats that can be born over a two year period if they are not spayed or neutered.

Catistics is a social studies lesson in which students interpret survey data and use critical thinking skills to come up with solutions to the pet overpopulation issue.

All four of the lessons are interactive and thought provoking, challenging students to come up with solutions to the community cat overpopulation problem.



Core Competencies

Communication

Children are inherently interested in animals. In our programs, that natural curiosity fuels their engagement and inspires them to connect with others on topics that are relatable such as pets, wildlife and farm animals. Children practise acquiring new information about the animal world and sharing that information both formally and informally in groups or pairs, in presentations, or with the public as advocates. Through our interactive activities students collaborate with classmates to solve problems and create projects, and reflect on their own experiences and how their knowledge has evolved over time.

Thinking

Through our lessons and presentations students have the opportunity to practise creative thinking, generating and developing new ideas about real issues that affect their lives every day. They are challenged to create new ways to change and improve the world around them as they learn more about animal well-being. By exploring their own basic needs and comparing them to the needs of animals, students think critically about how their personal decisions also affect other lives, their community, and the environment. Older students can also begin to consider their own experiences, their culture and the media, and contemplate where their knowledge and opinions come from.

Personal & Social

All of our programs have a basis in empathy building, compassion, and teaching young people to understand and care about themselves and others. Students learn to read the unspoken signals and emotions of animals and practise recognizing and regulating their own actions and emotions in accordance with their surroundings. They will begin to situate themselves in a broader environment that encompasses animals, other people, community and nature. Through games, activities and discussion they learn tangible strategies to peacefully solve problems and develop a sense of accountability that extends beyond the personal to the social.

Catboy: A novel study

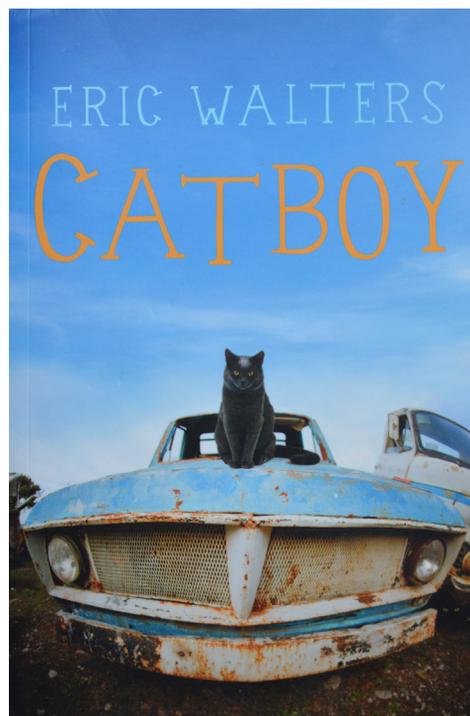
Using literature to understand community cat issues

Big Idea:

Structured in a way that allows the reader to learn along with the protagonist, the novel *Catboy* touches on some important information regarding feral cat colonies, as well as the issue of anthropomorphizing animals. Unfortunately, it neglects to discuss the sterilization of feral cats or their effect on wild birds, both issues that could be raised in classroom discussions of the story.

While focusing the novel's plot on Taylor and the cat colony, the author also intersperses messages about cultural diversity, gentrification and the question of morality vs. legality – all of which offer the possibility of further critical thinking and discussion.

Catboy incorporates aspects of both the curricular competencies and the content the new science curriculum and presents them with applicable, real-life meaning.



Catboy: A novel study

Assessing the impact of outdoor cats on other organisms and the environment will help students come up with solutions to sustaining a healthy local ecosystem.

Big Ideas Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking.
Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens.

Curricular Competencies

English
Language Arts

- ▶ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts
- ▶ Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking
- ▶ Transform ideas and information to create original texts
- ▶ Respond to text in personal and creative ways

**What
students
will know**

- ▶ Take an active role in interpreting, questioning and making connections to real situations in their community.
- ▶ Apply a variety of reading and critical thinking strategies to increase their comprehension of community cat populations.
- ▶ Develop a broader understanding of self, family and community.
- ▶ Think critically about ideas and information to deepen, extend and transform understanding.
- ▶ Consider multiple perspectives, beliefs and point of view in Canadian and other cultural contexts.

Materials

- ▶ *Catboy*, novel by Eric Walters
- ▶ *Hunter*, novel by Eric Walters (if using writing assignment)
- ▶ Literature Circle Roles worksheet
- ▶ Highlighted Excerpts
- ▶ Extension Activities (optional)

Activity

1. Introducing the novel: Bring four or five items that go with the book (cat food, kennel, stuffed raccoon, part of a leftover lunch, car part, brick, turban, condo development brochures). Share them with the students before they read the novel. This helps initiate inquiry about the book. The students can try to guess what the book is about based on the items, writing down their ideas and changing/adding to them while they read the novel.

2. (If you are not using the literature circle format introduce the students to the expectations and procedures of doing a novel study with the format you are using.)

Introducing literature circles: Explain each role as outlined in the Literature Circle section on page 9. If this is the first time you are doing literature circles with your class you may choose to do one as a class so that students understand their roles. This could be done with a short novel or even a picture book.

If students are confident in doing a novel study using the literature circle format, form groups of four to eight and hand each student a role worksheet. As they read chapter 1, let them use the examples on pages 10 and 11 for each role. After students have read each chapter, they can discuss the work from each role as a group and then change roles for the next chapter.

Literature circles can also be done as a class. Multiple students can have the same role and work independently or small groups can work as one role. Students then share their roles with the class and switch to a different role for the next chapter.

3. Highlighted Excerpts: As students read each chapter make sure they are aware of any excerpts from that particular chapter included on the Highlighted Excerpts on page 4 and 5. This will provide more accurate information from an animal welfare perspective on cat welfare.

4. Writing Assignment: A creative writing assignment using both *Catboy* and *Hunter*, Eric Walter's complimentary novel which tells the Catboy story from the cat's perspective, is included in this lesson. The assignment is designed so that students develop empathy for cats by writing from a cat's perspective.

After all students have read *Catboy*, ask them to reread chapter 1 and then have one student read the first chapter of *Hunter* aloud. After some class discussion of how the author tells the same story from a different point of view, give students the writing assignment worksheet, page 7, and ask them to choose a different chapter of *Catboy* to rewrite from Hunter's perspective. Students can then share their writing with the group chapter by chapter (not all chapters may be represented.)

5. Extension Activities: Three optional activities are outlined on page 6. These activities are designed to enhance the students' understanding and comprehension of the novel and the issues around community cats.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON PET OVERPOPULATION



Feral or community cats are the subject of the novel *Catboy*. In the novel, the main character's concern for the cats in the junkyard results in the trap and release of most of those cats. The message in the book is good overall but some details, outlined above, should be brought into the discussion about feral and community cats. The Highlighted Excerpts section, on page 7 of this lesson, addresses some of the misinformation and welfare issues not mentioned in the novel.

Cats are the number one companion animal in Canada with over one quarter of all households having one or more cats. Despite this, the vast numbers of homeless, feral and unwanted cats represents one of the greatest animal welfare challenges facing communities and humane organizations.

While well-intentioned, simply feeding a homeless cat population without ensuring one hundred percent spay/neuter provides the nutritional resources that result in increased reproduction and larger litters for the remaining intact animals. This subjects offspring to further suffering and continuance of the reproductive cycle.

Good management of a colony includes the effective trap, neuter, vaccinate, identification and release of adult ferals. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring good welfare for the adult feral cats, rehabilitating and rehoming abandoned cats, and the socialization and adoption of feral kittens. A wildlife mitigation strategy should be part of a well-managed cat colony protocol. Management of colonies should include daily monitoring and detailed record keeping.

The feral or community cat situation is significant in every city and town. These cats are sometimes loosely owned by caring individuals who feed them regularly but often no one takes responsibility for the health care and neutering of the animal.

Community cats are a result of abandoned, unneutered cats and kittens. Community cats that have regular contact with humans and kittens younger than 12 weeks can often be rehomed. But kittens that are born outdoors and have little to no contact with humans before they are four months old become feral and are usually not adoptable as pets. All of these cats should be neutered in order to end continual breeding and cat colonies.

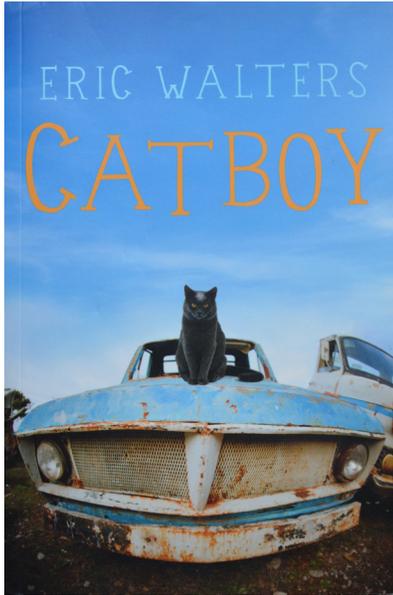
BC SPCA Definitions:

Community cats: Umbrella term for any unowned or loosely owned (fed by a person but not considered theirs) cats. Can be feral or abandoned.

Homeless abandoned cat: a cat who was once in the care of guardian but is now living as an ownerless cat.

Feral cat: an ownerless cat born out of captivity, without human socialization.

Highlighted Excerpts



Catboy provides some basic understanding of cat colonies and feral cats and the issues they face living outdoors on their own. However, there are some important issues that are either not addressed, wrongly represented or not clearly defined in the book. Below are some excerpts that need clarification or correction.

Chapter 3, page 22:

Mr. Singh says, "Nobody ever owns a cat. Ever. He (Blinky) may have lived with you, but you did not own him. You can own a dog, but not a cat."

Though cats have not been domesticated for as long as dogs and are not bred in the same capacity and for the same reasons as dogs, cats can be great pets and live happily indoors with their guardians. Cats can be clicker trained, kept indoors and depend on their guardians for survival. The reasons society views cats differently is due to the habits and expectations many guardians have when adopting a cat.

Chapter 10, page 62:

He dug into his bag and removed a piece of bread. He ripped it into small piece and tossed it at the cats. I quickly divided my sandwich and did the same. Page 70 : It had bones and French fries and buns. "For your cat friends."

Though this is well intended, feeding cats food like bread, bones and French fries, is not good because it doesn't meet their nutritional needs. Bones especially are not a good idea because they can splinter and cause internal health issues if digested. Feeding cats a nutritionally balanced commercial cat food is the best option.

Chapter 10 page 63:

Mr. Singh says, "These cats are not pets. They are too wild. When they (kittens) are very little, they need to be with their mother to survive. When they are older, they are already too wild. They can never be pets. Never."

This is not true. If socialized before the age of 11 weeks kittens can fairly easily become pets. Even some "feral" cats can with time and patience become pets. Many cats that people consider feral are actually abandoned pets and if given the chance can be reintroduced into homes as pets. There are different degrees of feralness in cat colonies. It depends on their history of positive or negative interactions with humans.

Chapter 17, page 115:

I took a deep breath and charged at the dogs, swinging the pole, clanging it against the hubcap and screaming at the top of my lungs!

Charging dogs and screaming would normally result in getting a dog more excited and a dog would likely lunge and bite. Taylor put himself at risk in this situation.

Chapter 28, page 179:

Dr. Reynolds explains to Taylor that the trapped cats will get examinations, vaccines, food, water and, if needed, a tranquilizer.

This should have gone one step further to include spay/neutering of the cats. Earlier in the book, Doris from the Feral Cat Association mentions that cats multiply quickly, which is true. A Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) program is the best way to control and reduce cat colonies in communities. It should also be mentioned that normally when trapping cats it is not a good idea to release them into a different area but rather return them to their established territory. In this case though, because of the construction, the Leslie Spit is probably a good option because it could hold hundreds of feral cats. We can only assume they would only relocate to this area if they were confident the cats would establish themselves there.

Chapter 28, page 187:

I ignored Simon and sat down on the pavement so Rocky and I were practically eye to eye.

Humans should never get close or interact with wildlife.

Extension Activities

Anthropomorphizing

Taylor's interpretations of the interactions between the cats and Rocky the raccoon are anthropomorphized. Though anthropomorphizing can be used as a literary tool, it is important to know when behaviours are interpreted this way versus real cat behaviours.

Have students find three examples where Taylor gives the cats human qualities or characteristics. Ask them to explain why they do or don't think that cats have these characteristics.

Animals are often anthropomorphized in movies and literature. Have students write down three examples of cats that are anthropomorphized in movies and literature. Ask them if they think this affects people's attitude towards animals.

Personal Connections

Catboy is not only about one boy's connection with cats; many of the characters and situations may be familiar to your students. Ask students to find an example in the book where they feel some connection and ask them to write a journal entry about their own experience or what they had in common with a certain character.

Thinking critically about the issues

Ask students to reflect on the questions below and then share their answers as a class.

- ▶ How can you tell if a cat outdoors is owned, abandoned or feral?
- ▶ Do cats who live in colonies like Hunter's contribute to the pet overpopulation problem?
- ▶ How do cat colonies affect the community both positively and negatively?
- ▶ What more could have been done to help the cats who were trapped before they were released?
- ▶ Compare the life of a feral cat with that of a companion/owned cat. Include in your comparison food, water, health, shelter and hazards.
- ▶ Compare the life of an indoor companion cat and a companion cat who is allowed outdoors. What are the pros and cons for each?

Writing assignment

Reread chapter 1 of *Catboy* and then read chapter 1 of *Hunter*.

Rewrite one of the chapters (except chapter 1) of *Catboy* from a cat's perspective. Then read that chapter in *Hunter* by the same author and compare his version to yours.

Literature Circles

Literature Circle Roles

Discussion Director: Come up with at least five questions for discussion that will make the group think rather than just give a one or two word answer.

Example questions:

Do you agree with.....

Why do you think

Describe.....

What is another way that.....

How is the (event, situation) similar to

How is the character influenced by his/her relationship to

What do you think will happen.....

Why do you think the author.....

Summarizer: In your own words briefly recount the important events that happened in the chapter.

Vocabulary enricher: Find at least five words that you may not know in the story and define them based on the context of the story. They could also be words you know but that are used in an interesting way in the chapter. Include the page number of the word and the reason you chose it.

Connector: Connect what happens in the story to real life (people, places or events). Decide if the events are realistic and if this did or could happen to you or someone you know. You will need to write about why certain happenings/events could or could not happen and give supporting evidence. You can also compare events in the story to other stories you've read that are similar.

***Character Analyzer:** Write about the characters. What are they like and what makes you think that? Compare them with people you know.

***Illustrator:** Illustrate a specific scene in the reading selection. Be creative. Draw a comic strip, create a poster or make a diorama of a scene from the chapter.

***Predictor:** Predict what will happen next. What will a character will do, what event will happen or what will take place next? When you are making predictions, you will need to predict based on clues from the text and your own feelings about why you think it will happen next.

***Passage Performer:** Act out a scene from the chapter.

* optional roles

Chapter One, Example

Discussion Director:

How does Taylor's new school seem different from his old school?

How does Taylor feel about his move to Toronto?

Who do you think threw the brick at the cats?

Why do you think Simon thinks cats are dirty?

Why does Taylor feel uncomfortable taking a shortcut home through the junkyard?

How has Taylor's life changed since he moved to Toronto?

Summarizer:

Taylor is adjusting to his new life and school. He moved to Toronto with his mom. They used to live in a small town with his grandparents so the big city is an adjustment for Taylor. His new school has students that speak 15 different languages at home. Taylor and Simon, his friend of two weeks, take a shortcut home after school through the hole in a fence of a junkyard. Taylor is not comfortable going through the junkyard but when Simon tells Taylor that there are dozens of cats in the junkyard this piques his interest because Taylor likes cats and misses his cat Blinky who had to be put down a year ago. Simon thinks cats are dirty. The boys sit and watch the cats but are startled when a brick flies through the air toward the cats.

Vocabulary Enricher:

undercarriage (pg 1) - the underside frame of the car

diversity (pg 3) - different cultures, traditions, ideas

precariously (pg 7) - not stable

ravine (pg 10) - the embankment around a stream or other flowing water

lair (pg 11) - a place where wild animals go to rest or sleep

Connector:

All cities have colonies of abandoned or feral cats. Cats who are born outdoors or who have been abandoned find places to live where they won't have much interaction with humans.

There are people who like cats and those who don't. The actions of the bullies in the story are real. People abuse and hurt animals even though it is against the law.

Students in Taylor's class speak many different languages. Some were born in Canada but can still speak the language of their family's culture. For some of the students English is their second language. This is just like many students in B.C. schools.

Character Analyzer:

Taylor is a very thoughtful boy. He wants to stay out of trouble and tries to make the best of his new move. He tries to help out his mom by getting supper started and cleaning up.

Simon is Korean. He gets good grades in school but still does extra work at home because his parents expect him to always do better.

Taylor is like Adam Goldberg on *The Goldbergs* because he is thoughtful, kind and a good son.

Illustrator:

Draw a picture of cars in the junkyard - some flattened, some up on bricks. Include the fence around the yard with the one part that has a hole in it. Add some cats roaming around and particularly the white cat with black feet.

Predictor:

Taylor and Simon will peek around the cars to see where the brick came from and try to run away to avoid being hit. They will be run out of the junkyard. They will watch through the fence to see who threw the brick. They will come up with a plan for a way to protect the cats from being hurt by whoever is throwing the bricks.

Passage Performer:

Act out the boys sneaking into the junkyard, hanging out by the car watching the cats and then seeing the brick fly through the air near them.

Discussion Director



Come up with at least five questions for discussion that will make the group think rather than just give a one or two word answer.

Example questions:

Do you agree with.....

Why do you think

Describe.....

What is another way that.....

How is the (event, situation) similar to

How is the character influence by his/her relationship to

What do you think will happen.....

Why do you think the author.....

Summarizer

blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah

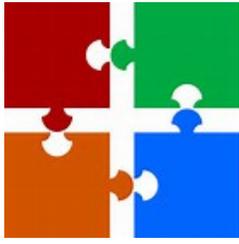
In your own words briefly recount the important events that happened in the chapter.

you mean you are
sad

Vocabulary Enricher

Find at least five words that you may not know in the story and define them based on the context of the story. They could also be words you know but that are used in an interesting way in the chapter. Include the page number of the word and the reason you chose it.





Connector

Connect what happens in the story to real life (people, places or events). Decide if the events are realistic and if this did or could happen to you or someone you know. You will need to write about why certain happenings/events could or could not happen and give supporting evidence. You can also compare events in the story to other stories you've read that are similar.

Character Analyzer

Write about the characters. What are they like and what makes you think that? Compare them with people you know.





Illustrator

Illustrate a specific scene in the reading selection. Be creative. Draw a comic strip, create a poster or make a diorama of a scene from the chapter.

Predictor

Predict what will happen next. What will a character will do, what event will happen or what will take place next? When you are making predictions, you will need to predict based on clues from the text and your own feelings about why you think it will happen next.





Passage Performer

Choose a scene from the chapter and act it out.

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

POSITION STATEMENTS

CAT WELFARE

WELFARE OF CATS

The BC SPCA is dedicated to promoting the health and welfare of cats, and celebrating the close bond and mutual relationship between people and their companion cats. Through education and advocacy the BC SPCA works to raise the profile and intrinsic worth of cats to encourage society to take responsibility for cats in their communities.

Guardians are expected to provide their cats with a good quality of life based on the Five Freedoms. In addition, guardians are expected to contribute to the reduction of cat overpopulation through early spay/neuter, ensuring their pets are permanently identified should they become lost or stolen and preventing cats from preying on wildlife.

COMPANION CAT HOUSING

Provisions for good welfare vary from cat to cat depending on their unique personality, age and health requirements. The BC SPCA recommends housing that balances the welfare and safety needs of cats with protection of wildlife. Most cats can experience good welfare indoors with environmental and social enrichment. For cats with a strong drive for outdoor access, a secure enclosure and/or walks with a harness and leash can provide additional enrichment and protection from health and safety risks such as predation.

HOMELESS AND ABANDONED CATS

The abandonment of cats is a criminal offense under the Criminal Code of Canada and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act. The BC SPCA supports preventing abandonment through public education.

Cats left to fend for themselves suffer poor welfare and, if unneutered, contribute to pet overpopulation. When well-intentioned citizens intervene to provide some aspects of care to a homeless cat, the BC SPCA advises individuals take steps to determine ownership of the cat and return the cat to the guardian. If individuals choose to care for a truly abandoned cat they should take steps to ensure the cat receives good welfare as per the Five Freedoms.

CAT COLONIES

The BC SPCA recognizes that colonies of cats exist in many regions of B.C. Cats (particularly females) will live in groups (colonies) where resources are available and colonies may be comprised of both homeless abandoned and feral cats. The BC SPCA supports the concept of well managed colonies where the principle goal is ending homeless and feral cat populations.

Good management of a colony includes an effective trap, neuter, vaccinate, identification and release of adult ferals. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring good welfare for the adult feral cats, rehabilitating and rehoming abandoned cats, and the socialization and adoption of feral kittens. A wildlife mitigation strategy should be part of a well-managed cat colony protocol. Management of colonies should include daily monitoring and detailed record keeping.

Five Freedoms: A concept first developed by The Brambell Committee, formed by the UK government to examine the conditions on commercial farms. Now internationally recognized, the Five Freedoms are considered applicable to all animals.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms (adapted from the original list) are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from pain, injury, and disease
3. Freedom from distress
4. Freedom from discomfort
5. Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being.

The BC SPCA's Five Freedoms form the basis of the Society's Charter and describe conditions that must be fulfilled in order to prevent the suffering of all animals in human care. The Society acknowledges that these freedoms are not enforceable and that absolute provision of these freedoms may not be possible, but strongly encourages all animal guardians to strive to provide them.

