

## Critter Care

**Suggested Grade Levels:** K-3

**Subject:** Language Arts/Science

**Character:** Responsibility

**Materials and technology to be used:**

- Stuffed rabbit – **x1**
- Writing utensils and paper – **x enough for each student**
- “Needs and Do Not Need - Photo Cards” – **x1 photo for each student (20 photos on this document)**
- Pocket chart or whiteboard w/ magnets – **x1**
- Rabbit care items (see “**Needs**” list below to gather examples) – **x1 of each**
- Live rabbit (optional) – **x1**
- “Anatomy of a Rabbit” cards – **x1 per student (cut sheet in half)**

**Objective(s):**

To provide students with information that will allow them to properly care for a critter. Students will also learn about general physiology and critter behavior. This lesson will focus on rabbits; however, it can easily be adapted to most small pets.

**Anticipatory Set/Hook:**

Have a stuffed rabbit sitting at the front of the room. Ask students: “What animal that you might adopt or buy does this?” (Mimic a rabbit wiggling its nose and tail or hopping). “Would you like to have a rabbit as a pet? Why or why not?” (If one of your students already owns a rabbit, ask how they received it, how old it is, what do they like to do together, etc.).

**Lesson Beginning:**

1. Inform students that there are some very important things to learn today if they want to make sure that a pet rabbit is healthy and happy.
2. Draw attention to the stuffed rabbit at the front of the room. Hold up the rabbit for all students to see.
3. Pass out a rabbit anatomy card to each student. Review the *basic* anatomy of a rabbit and its importance:
  - Break students up into multiple teams of three or more students each.
  - On the stuffed rabbit, point out a body part listed below, and then give the teams 30 seconds to discuss or write down what they think rabbits may use that part of their body

for. Challenge the teams to come up with as many 'purposes' as they can. Share and explain.

### **Parts of a Rabbit**

**Big ears** – are for listening and are a built in “air-conditioner.” They help the rabbit keep cool during the summer.

**Feet** – are for hopping and running. They use them to go find things like food, hay, and water, but mostly feet are used to jump up and down, run, and to scratch an itch.

**Nose** – twitches because the rabbit is always on guard sniffing its surroundings. Also, when it twitches its nose, the lip spreads out moisture and helps them smell better.

**Big eyes** – stick out and help the rabbit see all the way around them. They cannot see well right in front of them. To add to their sight, rabbits use scent and their hearing to feel safe and to find things, too.

**Tail** – is used as a warning to other bunnies. They will lift it and wiggle it, like waving a flag, to warn their buddies of danger in the wild.

**Hair** – is for protection against harsh weather and other environmental factors.

### **Middle of Lesson:**

1. Distribute a photo card to each student of a thing rabbits either ***need*** or ***do not need***. Allow students time to sort the cards on a pocket chart or turn them into magnets. The whiteboard can be utilized to sort them into two groups – **Needs** and **Do Not Need**. Students can “hop like a rabbit” to place their photo in the pocket chart.

\*This activity can be completed in small groups by having multiple copies of the photo cards.

2. Discuss the needs of rabbits (and most other critters). Bring out and display as many real examples (props) as possible:

### **Needs of a Rabbit**

- a. **Home** – Your rabbit needs a large, spacious home. A place that is clean, calming, safe, and allows for plenty of extra room to stretch and hop. Make sure that your rabbit does not have its home or bed in a place that is too cold or too hot – ie. not right next to the vent where the heat or cooling comes out, or right in the sun all the time, or right next to the stove or by a door where a lot of cold air will come through during the winter. The larger the home, the better!

- b. **Water** – All living things need water. Wild rabbits learn from their parents how to find water. Pet rabbits cannot turn on faucets to get water for themselves, so they rely on us to do it for them. It is very important that your rabbit has lots of clean, fresh water every day. Use a proper bottle or bowl.
- c. **Timothy Hay** – Your rabbit should have as much fresh, timothy hay as it desires. Timothy hay is a grass hay that will help their stomachs and other parts work well. It also helps their teeth stay a healthy length as they chew on it. Timothy hay is an essential part of a rabbit's diet.
- d. **Pellets** - Pellets are made from vitamins and minerals that your rabbit needs to stay healthy. Fresh pellets should be provided daily. If you want to give your rabbit other things to eat, you need to ask your vet for instructions on other foods and treats that are okay.
- e. **Bathroom Area** – Rabbits need an area to do their business. They are very clean animals, and they like to go to the bathroom in the same area. A litter box designed for critters can be used, but you need litter that is specially made for rabbits. DO NOT use cat litter. Paper bedding/litter is acceptable.
- f. **Daily Brushing** - This will help your rabbit's fur stay shiny and clean and is a fun way to interact with your pet. A rabbit will lick its body to clean itself, but sometimes it needs help. A rabbit continually grows hair and brushing helps remove the hair. In turn this keeps your rabbit from swallowing too much of it during their cleaning.
- g. **Love** – If you are going to have a rabbit as a pet, it needs a lot of love and attention just like you. You can love your rabbit by petting it. Some like to be held, some do not. Respect this. They need to be given attention every day!
- h. **Playing/Exercise** – Playing for a rabbit is different than the ways you play. Sometimes they leap into the air and kick their feet back. This is called a "binky".
  - Rabbits need plenty of exercise. Every day they should be given time to stretch their legs and run and jump on their own. If you take your rabbit outside, never let it run loose, always make sure it is on a critter leash or in a fenced in area.
  - Rabbits play with their mouth and their feet. What does this mean? They like to chew, and since they don't have hands, they use their mouth, like a hand, to pick things up.
  - Give your rabbit safe, appropriate toys that will keep them busy: Wooden chew toys are great for chewing and keeping teeth healthy. Baby rattles are exciting to rabbits as they can pick them up with their mouths and toss them. Cardboard tubes stuffed with hay are also good enrichment items for a rabbit. Rabbits also love balls!
  - Some like to find healthy treats hidden in their hay. Many rabbits like to have a lot of hay put in a big cardboard box and they will jump in there to snuggle and maybe play hide-n-seek with you.

### End of Lesson:

1. If possible, include a handling demonstration with a live rabbit (or stuffed).
2. Have students sit in a circle. Place an emphasis on moving slowly and being very quiet as the rabbit does not know you and will get spooked very easily.

**Option A:** A live rabbit can be in the room and not used as a petting demonstration but rather an observation period. A play pen can be set up with rabbit food, treats, water, litter and toys, and students can take turns making scientific observations based on the rabbit's interactions with its environment. They can take notes on what they observe the rabbit doing and write or draw more about it later.

**Option B:** Introduce the “two finger touch” technique and allow each student a chance to pet the rabbit. This option can be used with the stuffed rabbit as well.

*-The best way to get to know your rabbit is to sit on the floor with them. The rabbit feels safe and can get to know you. Some rabbits like to be cuddled and held, most do not. It can be scary for them. We need to learn how to pet and hold a rabbit properly and safely.*

*-Ask students to hold up two fingers. When you pet your rabbit, start by using two fingers to pet them down their back. Do not pet their heads, including their ears, as this may scare them and lead to a bite. Rabbits also have very sensitive noses and whiskers, so they do not like being touched there, as well.*

*-Bring the rabbit around the circle and allow each student a chance to practice petting. If the students have proven capable, allow the rabbit to roam freely on the floor in the middle of the circle of students. Ensure the students have their legs out to provide a bit of a barrier for the rabbit's safety.*

*-Remind students to **never chase** a rabbit and to **remain calm** if the rabbit approaches them or tries to get out of the circle. *If you would like to pet it, or play with it, you must always let the rabbit come to you. You do not want to scare the rabbit and stress it out. If \_\_\_\_\_ (enter rabbit's name) comes over to you, you can pet him/her gently using the “two finger touch” method that we learned. Remember, if \_\_\_\_\_ doesn't come to you, everyone has already had a chance to pet.**

*-As the rabbit is exploring, encourage students to give verbal observations of what they are noticing. Use this time to review what was taught previously about rabbit body language and needs.*

3. If you are using a stuffed rabbit, bring the rabbit around the circle and each student can practice the “two finger touch” technique.

**Closure:**

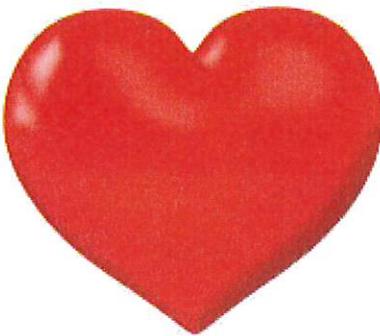
1. Allow students 1 minute to reflect on what they learned. "Quick-Quiz" the class using yes/no responses. **Example:**

\*Pretend to pet the rabbit incorrectly\* – *So this is how I properly pet a rabbit?* **Class should all say 'NO'.** *Can I give my rabbit some of my food at dinner? I heard they love avocados.* **'NO'.** *Rabbits enjoy running, so I chase mine around the backyard.* **'NO'.** *Rabbits should always have fresh Timothy hay, pellets, and water available.* **'YES'.** *I need to give my rabbit attention and safe exercise every day.* **'YES'.**

Information adapted from Oxbow Academy, a division of Oxbow Enterprises, Inc.

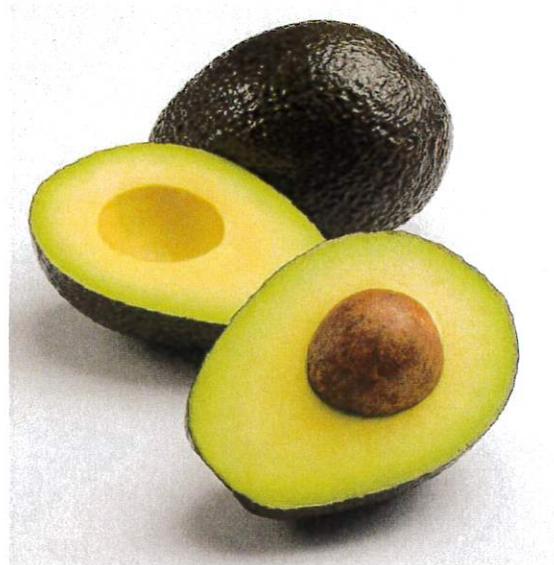
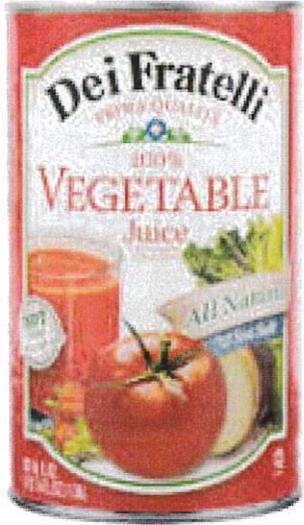
Needs





**Do Not Need**





**Avacados and Aloe Vera plants  
are toxic to rabbits!!**



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