

How to Speak Cat and Dog

Suggested Grade Levels: 4-6

Subject: Language Arts

Character: Respect – Safety with Pets

Materials and technology to be used:

- Computer with projection capabilities OR photos of both a dog and a cat – **x1**
- “Reading Your Dog’s Body Language” handout – **x1 per student**
- “Reading Your Cat’s Body Language” handout – **x1 per student**
- “What is this Cat Telling You? Worksheet and Answers” – **x1 per student**
- Exit Ticket (sticky notes, paper, fake ticket, etc.) – **x1 per student**
- Pencils – **x1 per student**
- Red/Green highlighters or markers – **x1 of each per student**

Objective(s):

Students will be able to interpret feline and canine verbal and non-verbal communication. Students will also be able to understand the warning signs that these animals give and thus, will decrease their risk of being bitten or scratched.

Anticipatory Set/Hook:

Have a large photo of both a dog and a cat either projected or physically posted up somewhere in the classroom. Try to put the photos behind where the teacher will be standing and talking. Point to the photos and ask students, “What do you think these animals are telling us?” “How can you tell?” Call on a few volunteers to share their thoughts but do not add any teacher input (*yet*). Tell the students that today they are going to learn about how cats and dogs talk to us. *Are you ready to learn this fascinating language?!*

Lesson Beginning:

1. Tell students that learning what cats and dogs are “saying” is important. It can help us understand how they are feeling. It can also help us predict their behavior. Your cat or dog is talking all the time.
2. Ask students: “How do you let others know what you are thinking or feeling?” Usual responses will include talking, writing, body language, and sign language.

Believe it or not, animals and people have very similar ways of expressing their thoughts and feelings!

3. Ask students: “How do you think animals let us know what they are thinking or feeling?”

Have students turn and talk about this question with a neighbor. Discuss with the whole group.

Speaking and body language are the main two forms of communication for dogs and cats.

Middle of Lesson:

1. Engage students in a discussion about how dogs and cats communicate through *speaking* and *body language*. This discussion will introduce students to basic and necessary background information:

(Italicized text = scripted text that can be read to students as is)

Speaking

-“Can cats or dogs speak the way we do using words?” *No! But they can speak using sounds that they understand. Most cats and dogs can make at least 16 different sounds!*

-“What are some sounds cats and dogs make?” Have students practice a meow, purr, growl, bark, and hiss.

-“What is the meaning of each of these sounds?” – *Some sounds are easier to understand than others. A cat purr usually means “I’m happy and relaxed.” However, cats and dogs can use several different sounds (meows, purrs, barks, whimpers) to make commands (“Feed me!”), make a request (“Please pet me!”), or make a complaint (“I accidentally got locked in the closet – I don’t like it in here!”). However, cats and dogs typically hiss or growl as warning signals to tell others to stay away or back off. If a cat or dog growls or hisses at you, leave them alone. If we don’t, they will use alternate means to get their point across. This could come as a bite or scratch.*

Body Language

-*Cats and dogs also use their bodies to express themselves. People talk with their bodies, too. For example, if I shrug my shoulders, what does that mean? It usually means, “I don’t know.” (You can add in other examples of human body language to help show the correlation with animal body languages.)*

-Choose four volunteers to act out different emotions using only their bodies... Show how we look when we are happy, mad, sad, and surprised. Ask the rest of the class to guess what emotion the actor is expressing.

*-Felines and canines use their rears, tails, eyes, ears, and body posture (the way they stand, sit, or lay) to "talk." Most of the time they use their bodies and sounds **together** to tell you something!*

End of Lesson:

1. Pass out the "Reading Your Cat's Body Language" handout to each student.
2. Tell students that sometimes it can be a bit trickier to read cat body language due to all the subtleties. Therefore, you are going to talk through their next activity, together. As a class, look at each picture on the "Reading Your Cat's Body Language" handout. Examine and discuss what is happening in each picture. Think about:
 - a. The body language – look at each part of the body and what it is doing.
 - b. What sound the animal might be making.
 - c. What they may be feeling.
 - d. If the cat is safe to approach, touch, and/or pet. Why or Why not?
3. Distribute the "What is this Cat Telling you?" worksheet to each student. Hold on to the "Answers" sheet for now. Using the information that was just talked about, have the students complete the worksheet individually or in a small group. Once complete, pass out the "Answers" sheet to each student so that they may check their own work.
4. Tell students that they are now going to learn more about dog body language.
5. Split students up into groups of three. Engage them in an "Article Hunt." Have students read the "Reading Your Dog's Body Language" handout in their groups and complete the following actions...

-Highlight any similarities to cat body language in **green** and differences in **red**.

-Put a **“!”** by any information you find SUPER interesting and a **“?”** by any confusing information.

-Circle two to three facts that you would like to share with the class.

6. Have certain small groups share their "Article Hunt" and discuss as a class.

Closure:

1. Provide students with 1 minute to reflect on what they have learned today. Revisit the two photos on the board that were introduced at the very beginning of the lesson. Ask students: "Now what do you think these animals are telling us? Did your answers from the beginning change? Why?" You may wish to have students write their answers down on an "Exit Ticket"

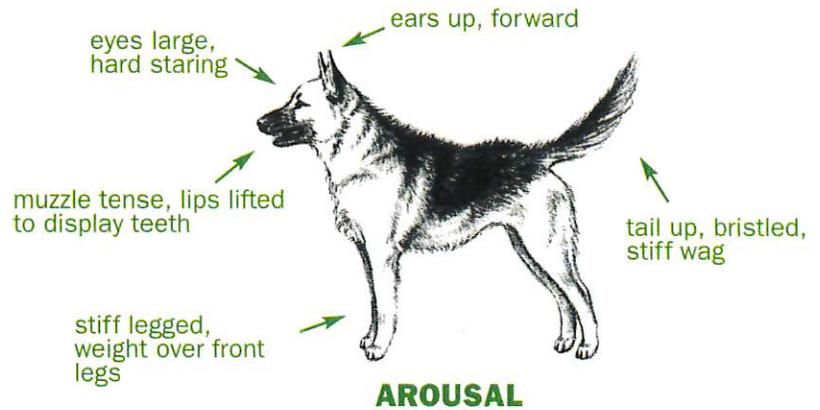
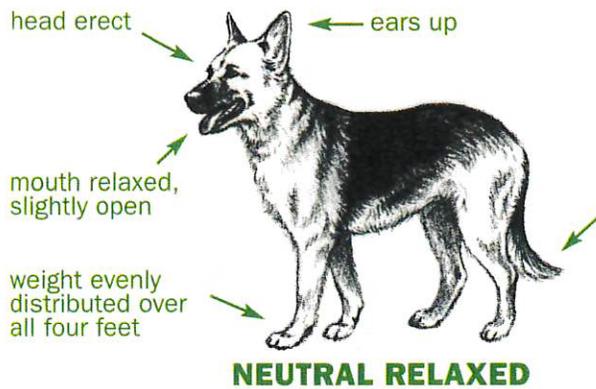
(this can be a sticky note, piece of notebook paper, fake ticket, etc..) and turn them in.

Information adapted from the Humane Society of Missouri



Reading Canine Body Postures

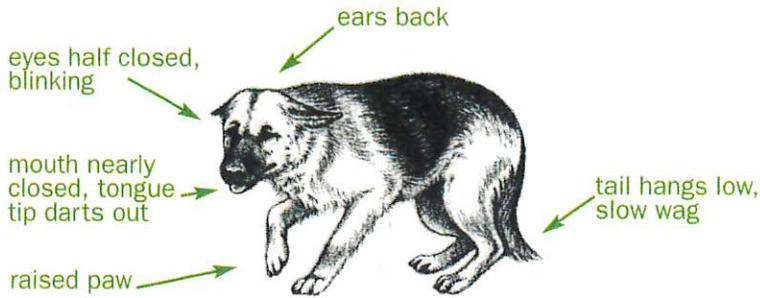
While dogs cannot speak, they do display their state of mind via their body language. By taking careful note of ear position, pupil dilation, facial tension (particularly around the muzzle and forehead), tail carriage and body weight distribution, an observer can detect whether a dog is relaxed or fearful, or acting in a submissive or dominant manner toward the observer.



The dog has been stimulated by something in his environment. When the dog is excited by something pleasurable, the hackles will be down and the tail will be carried a little lower and will loosely wag. The muzzle will be relaxed and the tongue may be seen. This posture may be displayed to subordinates in order to express higher ranking pack position.

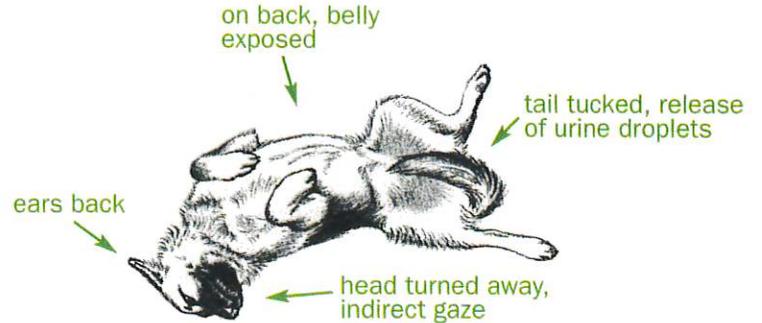
This threatening posture is used to chase another away or, if need be, to attack in order to protect possessions, pack or self.

ASPCA



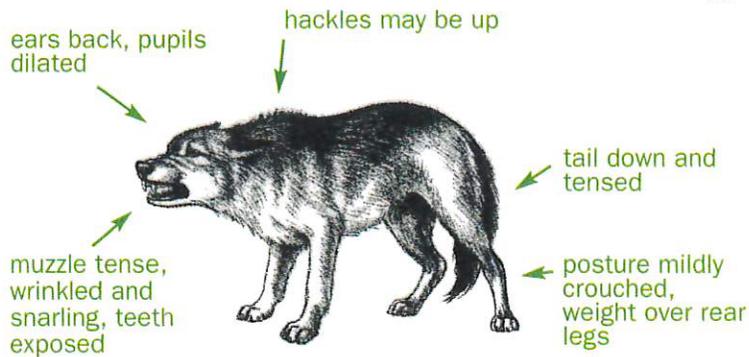
ACTIVE SUBMISSION

This pacifying posture is used when a dog acknowledges another dog or human's higher social ranking, or to inhibit another's aggression.



PASSIVE SUBMISSION

Belying up indicates surrender, a pacifying gesture offered to a more dominant or aggressive individual.



DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION

When fearful, a dog will give warning signals to indicate he does not wish to be approached. If, unheeded, he will bite to protect himself.

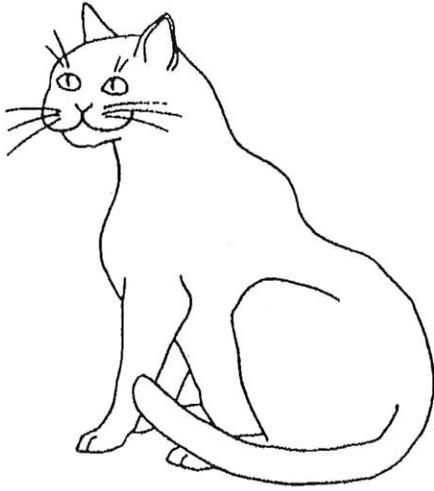
READING YOUR CAT'S "BODY LANGUAGE"

Cats use different body postures to communicate their emotions. Below are some typical postures you may observe in your cat. When observing your cat, try to get an idea of its usual attitude when alone and in contact with other animals, including people. As cats become more anxious about their surroundings, they will try to avoid contact with threats. Their score may change very quickly depending on the seriousness of the threat. The highest scores usually are seen only when escape is not possible.

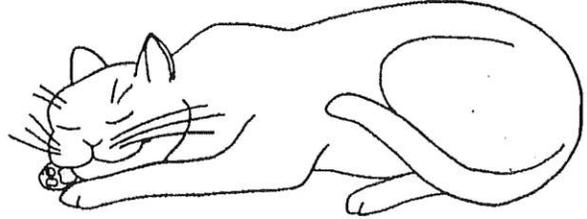
Score	Body Postures	Head Postures
1 Relaxed	<p>Activity – sleeping or resting, alert or active, may be playing</p> <p>Body – lying on side, on belly or sitting; if standing or moving, back horizontal</p> <p>Breathing – slow to normal</p> <p>Legs – bent, hind legs may be laid out; when standing extended</p> <p>Tail – extended or loosely wrapped; up or loosely down when standing</p>	<p>Head – laid on surface or over body, some movement</p> <p>Eyes – closed to open, pupils slit to normal size</p> <p>Ears – normal to forward</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds – none, purr</p>
2 Alert	<p>Activity – resting, awake or actively exploring</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back is horizontal</p> <p>Breathing – normal</p> <p>Legs – bent; when standing extended</p> <p>Tail – on body or curved back; up or tense downwards when standing; may be twitching</p>	<p>Head – over the body, some movement</p> <p>Eyes – open normally, pupils normal</p> <p>Ears – normal or erected to front or back</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds – none or meow</p>
3 Tense	<p>Activity – resting or alert, may be actively exploring, trying to escape</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back of the body is lower than the front ("slinking")</p> <p>Breathing – normal</p> <p>Legs – bent, hind legs bent and front legs extended when standing</p> <p>Tail – close to body; tense downwards or curled forward, may be twitching when standing.</p>	<p>Head – over the body or pressed to body, little or no movement</p> <p>Eyes – wide open or pressed together, pupils normal to partially dilated</p> <p>Ears – erected to front or back</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward</p> <p>Sounds – none, meow, or plaintive meow</p>
4 Anxious	<p>Activity – alert, may be actively trying to escape</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or sitting; if standing or moving the back of the body is lower than the front</p> <p>Breathing – normal or fast</p> <p>Legs – under body, bent when standing</p> <p>Tail – close to the body; may be curled forward close to body when standing. The tip may move up and down or side to side.</p>	<p>Head – on the plane of the body, little or no movement</p> <p>Eyes – wide open, pupils dilated</p> <p>Ears – partially flattened</p> <p>Whiskers – normal to forward or back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling</p>
5 Fearful	<p>Activity – motionless, alert or crawling</p> <p>Body – lying on belly or crouched directly on top of all paws, may be shaking; if standing the whole body is near to the ground, may be shaking</p> <p>Breathing – fast</p> <p>Legs – bent; when standing bent near to surface</p> <p>Tail – close to the body; curled forward close to the body when standing.</p>	<p>Head – near to surface motionless</p> <p>Eyes – fully open, pupils fully dilated</p> <p>Ears – fully flattened</p> <p>Whiskers – back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling</p>
6 Terrified	<p>Activity – motionless alert</p> <p>Body – crouched directly on top of all paws, shaking. Hair on back and tail bushy.</p> <p>Breathing – fast</p> <p>Legs – stiff or bent to increase apparent size</p> <p>Tail – close to body</p>	<p>Head – lower than the body</p> <p>Eyes – fully opened, pupils fully dilated</p> <p>Ears – fully flattened, back on head</p> <p>Whiskers – back</p> <p>Sounds – none, plaintive meow, growling, yowling, hissing</p>

What is this Cat Telling You?

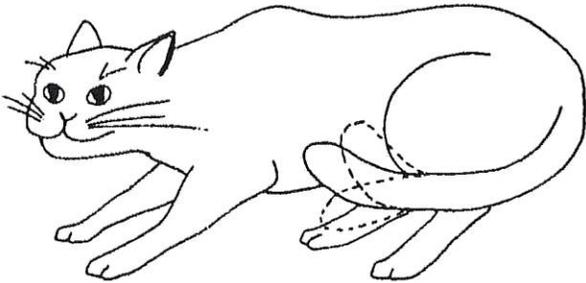
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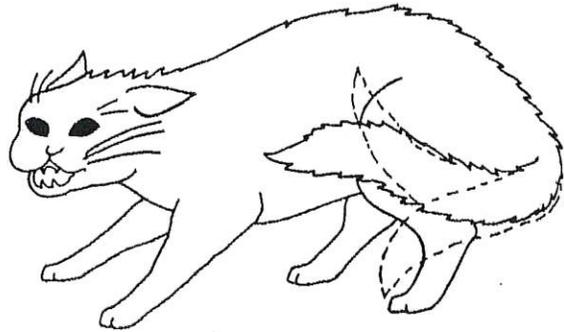
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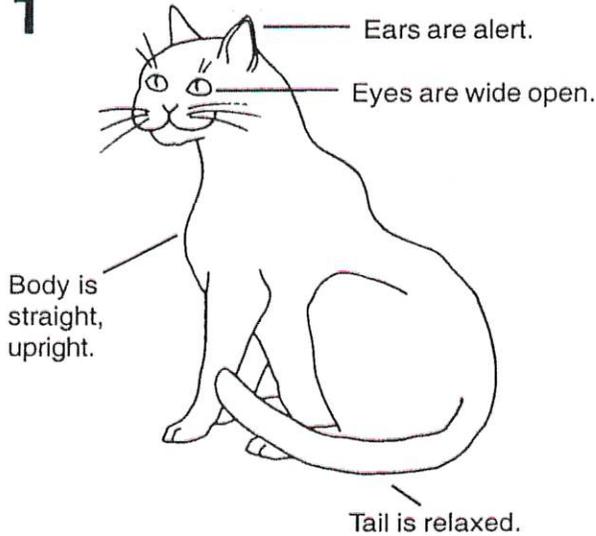
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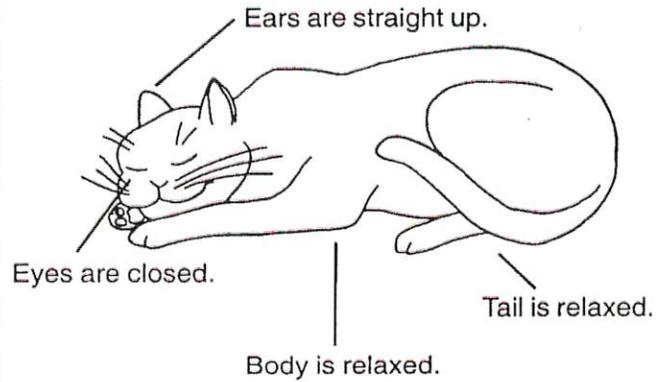
Answer Sheet

1



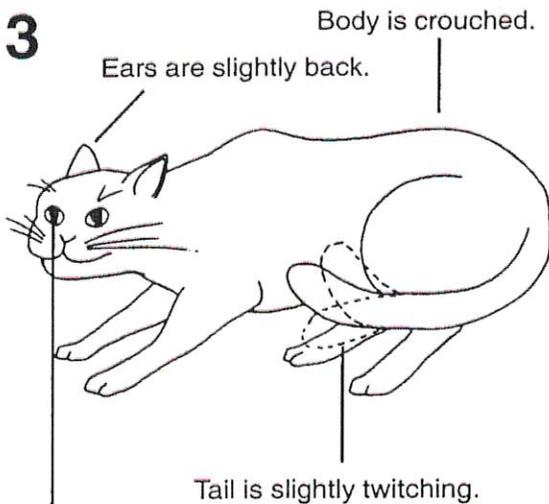
This cat is happy. "I trust you and am ready for attention." A safe cat to pet.

2



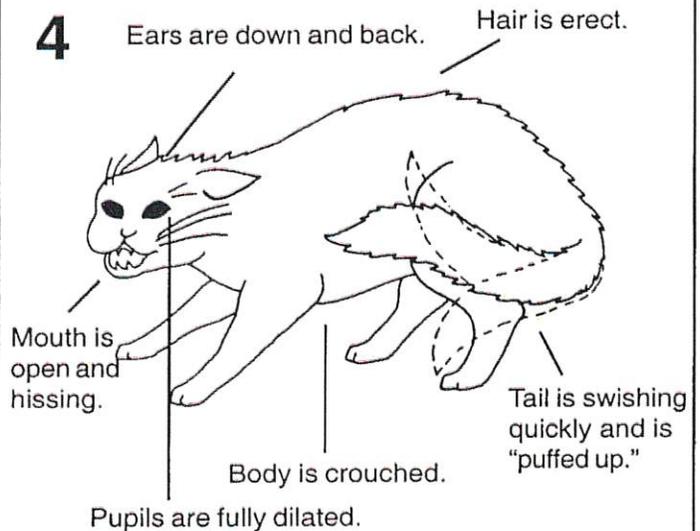
This cat feels safe and happy. Cats must trust you before sleeping in your presence. Don't surprise a sleeping cat.

3



This cat is playful. "Let's have some fun!" He is ready to pounce, so approach with some caution.

4



This cat is ready to defend himself! "Don't touch me or I may bite or scratch!" Leave this cat alone.