



**LESSON:** Preventing Pet Homelessness

**GRADE:** 4<sup>th</sup>—5<sup>th</sup>

**TIME:** 45 min.

**DESCRIPTION:** Students will read stories about real animals who have become homeless and taken in by Heart of the Valley. They will identify common reasons why companion animals become homeless, what can be done to prevent pet homelessness, and how to help animals in need.

**COMMON CORE STANDARDS:** ELA: Reading, Speaking & Listening

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will discover common causes of and ways to prevent pet homelessness.

**GOALS:**

1. Identify common reasons why companion animals become homeless.
2. Identify methods to prevent animal homelessness.
3. Develop empathy and compassion for companion animals.

**MATERIALS:**

- Homeless animal story cards (1-2 story cards per group)
- Question cards (1 per group)
- Question cards with answers
- Whiteboard or flipchart and markers

**LESSON DETAILS:**

1. Introduction
  - a. Raise a silent hand if you have been to our shelter. Some of you may know what we do, raise your hand if you have an idea about what an animal shelter is or what we do at Heart of the Valley. *Build and elaborate on some ideas.*
2. Homeless Animals
  - a. The only reason why Heart of the Valley and any animal shelter exists is because there is a problem: there are homeless companion animals.
  - b. **Companion Animals:**
    - i. Domestic/companion animals are animals we have bred to depend on us for their physical, behavioral and social needs.
    - ii. We are responsible for taking care of companion animals and treating them with kindness and respect.
  - c. At Heart of the Valley, we take care of cats and dogs who have become homeless and find them new families. Today we're going to talk about some common ways animals become homeless and how to prevent animal homelessness.
3. Homeless Animals
  - a. Divide the class into 4 to 6 groups.
  - b. Pass out an HOV animal story to each group (1 or 2 copies) and instruct the students to read about their animal as a group.
  - c. Distribute question sheets (corresponding to each story) to each group.

- d. After giving time for students to answer questions, let each group share a quick summary of their animal. Ask one or two the questions relating to their animal out loud (so all of the students can hear) and let the group respond.
  - e. As the lesson continues, create a list of common reasons why pets come to Heart of the Valley
    - i. Moving
    - ii. Behavioral problems
    - iii. Financial reasons
    - iv. Abandoned
    - v. Born to a stray mother/overcrowding
    - vi. Ran away/stray
  - f. More discussion questions:
    - i. How is Bandit's story different from all the rest? *His owners abandoned him instead of taking him to an animal shelter. If an owner can no longer take care of a pet, the most responsible thing to do is to bring the pet to Heart of the Valley.*
    - ii. What will you think about before adopting an animal? *Build on responses.*
    - iii. Why is pet homelessness a problem?
4. Prevention
- a. Sometimes pet homelessness can be prevented.
  - b. What can you do to prevent companion animal homelessness?
    - i. Think ahead before adopting
    - ii. Give animals ID tags/microchips
    - iii. Spay/Neuter
    - iv. Take the time to humanely train your pet
    - v. Choose the right pet
    - vi. Educate yourself and others about pet behavior and needs.
    - vii. Commit to keeping your pet for his/her whole life.
    - viii. Provide for the pet's needs, like scratching posts, places to run.
    - ix. Speak up! If you see a pet in trouble (abandoned, not cared for, etc.), tell an adult.
5. Helping Homeless Animals
- a. Support your local animal shelter by volunteering, raising money, donating supplies, etc.
  - b. If someone is looking for a new pet, tell them about the homeless pets who need families.
  - c. Create posters about animals who are ready to be adopted, make toys to donate to the shelter, etc.
6. Wrap-up
- a. Does anybody have any questions?
  - b. Invite students to visit Heart of the Valley and mention other opportunities to become involved (Junior Volunteer Program, Birthday Parties, Pet Pals Camp, Foster Families). Distribute ¼ page "Want to do more with Heart of the Valley?" handout to each student.

**NOTES:** Adapted from the *Humane Education Resource Guide's* "Helping Homeless Animals" Lesson.