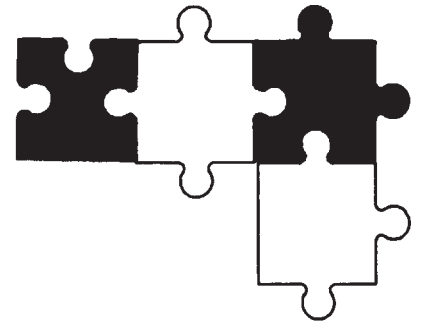


Activity 1



CLASSROOM PET



STUDY QUESTION:

What do rabbits eat? How can we grow food for them?

THE ACTIVITY:

Students observe rabbit, then plan and prepare a food source for it.

CURRICULUM FIT:

DIVISION ONE - SCIENCE

- Describe proper care of plants and animals such as pets

AGRICULTURE CONCEPTS:

Care of animals as pets or as farm animals.
Appropriate food for animals and humans. (Although it is often difficult to think of rabbits and other farm animals as food sources, it must be realized just how important they are in this role.)

PURPOSE:

- To promote awareness of physical characteristics and animal needs.
- To promote student awareness of consequences for an animal if caregivers irresponsible. ("Seven trays/seven days" promotes familiarity with feeding responsibilities).
- To experience planting seed and harvesting.

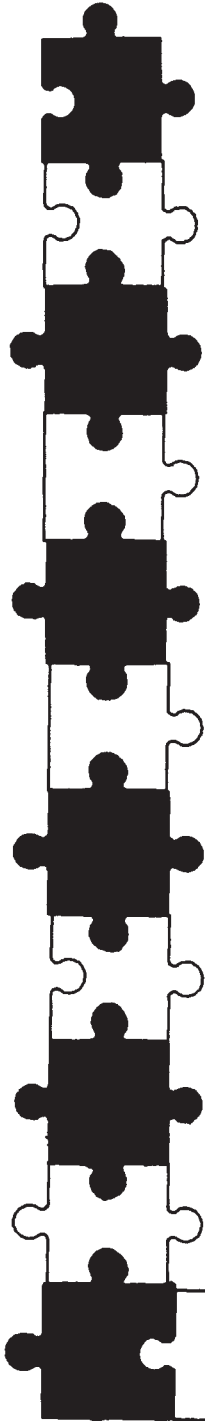
MATERIALS REQUIRED:

Rabbit (or other classroom pet), cage, feeding and bedding materials
Manual on how to properly care for animal
7 plastic growing trays and seeds
— radish, lettuce, swiss chard, etc.
Experience chart, stand and felt pens
Sign paper, 7 pieces printed with day of the week
(no abbreviations)
Live alfalfa (if possible) and bag of commercial alfalfa pellets

TIME REQUIRED:

Depends on ability of class. Plan on at least two class periods to introduce students to concept of caring for rabbit. Then, allot several minutes each day to feed and clean rabbit.

Note: This lesson can be used in conjunction with the next lesson which deals with waste disposal.



BACKGROUND - For the Teacher

Having an animal in the classroom entails extra work, but it can be an invaluable teaching asset. Children should be made aware at the outset that their responsibilities to the animal consists of more than cuddling and playing games with it. Be careful that the animal does not become a distraction to other classroom work. The presence of a rabbit, gerbil or other creature can help students learn about the care and nurturing that a pet needs in order to survive and be well. A classroom pet is also advantageous in that it can provide enjoyment for the students and act as a reward for good behaviour. Children can feel very good about feeding the rabbit and being responsible for its food source. However, because the animal will require constant care over its lifespan, the decision to obtain one should not be made lightly, as the teacher is ultimately responsible for its care and well-being. It should also be noted that some students may have allergies to animal fur, which may necessitate regular bathing of the animal in an allergy solution, or housing it in another room.

PROCEDURE

Part 1

Introduction

1. Introduce the rabbit by talking about the visitor who will be coming to spend the year with the class. Ask the children who they think it might be. Give them hints.

Part 2

Preparation

2. Have the children guess what a rabbit looks like, what it eats, what it needs to survive, etc. Capitalize on their excitement by telling the children that the animal will be brought in once you get their help as “grown-up responsible school people.”
3. Discuss what children had for breakfast. Is there anyone who didn't have any breakfast? Anyone who didn't like what they had for breakfast? How would we feel if we were hungry and couldn't get food or had to eat food that we did not like or that would make us sick?
4. Create an experience chart with what children already know about the diets of familiar animals. Start with dogs, cats, birds, pigs, cows, horses, sheep, chickens and people. Then, talk about what rabbits eat.

Note: This chart attracts a lot of positive attention in a hallway, and can be a starting point for projects for a science fair — food costs, food chain, food processing, food preservatives, added vitamins/minerals, food colouring, food from farm, food produced in the city.

Part 3

Activity

5. Divide students into 7 groups assigning each group a day of the week. Label their trays and let them plant seeds. Place in adequate light and water regularly. When sprouts come up, each group — on a rotating daily basis — gets its crop set down for the rabbit to graze on. Remember to put Saturday and Sunday down Friday afternoon and Monday, too, if it's a long weekend.

Part 4

Conclusion

6. Offer live alfalfa and commercial alfalfa pellets to the rabbit and observe its preference.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the rabbit's favourite food. How can you tell?
2. What would happen if rabbits were fed the wrong food — meat, for example? What would happen if the farmers didn't give their baby chicks, piglets and calves the right food? What would happen to a dog or cat or bird in the city if the people who owned them did not plan ahead and act responsibly for them.
3. Discuss what other factors contribute to the healthy life of a pet rabbit — proper temperature, clean place to sleep, water, etc.
4. What happened to the seeds when they were put in soil, watered, and given light and warmth?

EVALUATION STRATEGY

1. Participation and degree of responsibility shown towards the animal.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

1. Draw sketches of a rabbit and the foods it eats.
2. Go on a field trip to a farm where the class can observe how livestock is cared for.

By Ann Marshall