

LESSON #5: WHAT ARE PETS TRYING TO TELL YOU?

OVERVIEW:

The purpose of this lesson is for students to carefully observe behaviors and determine the message being sent in order to respond to that message appropriately. This lesson begins with an examination of humans, then moves on to dogs.

SUB-QUESTION:

How can observable behaviors be interpreted and why is this helpful?

WAYS OF KNOWING URBAN ECOLOGY:



Students will...

Understand

- Animals send out non-verbal messages and these messages can be deciphered

Talk

- Discuss observations
- Discuss the implications of misinterpreting what is observed

Do

- Research dog behaviors under various circumstances
- Analyze the variety of non-verbal behaviors

Act

- Increase one's sensitivity to reading non-verbal communication

SAFETY GUIDELINES:

None.

PREPARATION:

Time:

2 class periods

Day 1: Activity 5.1

Day 2: Activity 5.2

Materials:

Activity 5.1

Powerpoint "What are you *really* telling me?"

Index cards

Activity 5.2

Powerpoint, "What is your dog trying to tell you?"

Readings:

- Canine Body Language (<https://positively.com/dog-training/understanding-dogs/canine-body-language/>)
- Fair Play (<https://www.sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/fair-play>)
- *Ethogram of dog-human interaction* by Gacsi, dt. AI (2009)

Canid Ethogram handout (upper grades)

Dog language handouts (lower grades)

Videos of dog behavior

INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE**Activity 5.1: What are you really telling me?**

1. Use the slide show to accompany your discussion.
2. Hand gestures:
 - Show students a hand gesture (thumbs up).
 - Ask, “What does this gesture mean?” Most students will say something like, “it’s good.”
 - Have students think-pair-share about different hand gestures and their meanings.
 - Share some with the whole class and discuss whether everyone is in agreement about what each means.
 - Lead this into a discussion on hand gestures that have different meanings in different cultures. Students might want to research and/or share examples from their backgrounds. Explore as time allows.
3. Show images of a few facial expressions.
 - Ask students to guess what emotion is being displayed.
 - Give each student an index card and have them write the name of an emotion on it (e.g., happy, sad, frustrated).
 - Collect the cards and mix them up.
 - Pass them out randomly and give students a moment to think about what they will do.
 - “Popcorn” around the room. Have one student at a time make their expression, let students guess what it is, then they turn their card around to confirm what they were trying to show. That student then points to the next student to do their expression.
4. Discuss body gestures.
 - Show an example and discuss what the person is saying with their body language.
 - Ask students to brainstorm a few ways to send a message with body language.
 - This could lead into a discussion on personality types. What types of personalities can you detect without hearing a word the person says? Are there subtle and obvious ways to hold oneself that conveys your personality?
 - Brainstorm the role of posture, eye contact and movement in conveying a message.
5. Raise the issue of the “tell.”
 - Ask students how they can tell what someone is thinking without being told explicitly.
 - Students might know the show, “Lie to Me.” Discuss the power of understanding what someone is telling them through gesture, facial expression and body language.
6. Challenge students to create a role-play. Create a short script as a group (or use the one provided). Then give students a few minutes to work in pairs to tell the story without using words, only body language, gestures and facial expressions. Pairs take turns performing the role-play. Discuss what the scene really showed:
 - what personalities were depicted;

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- how did body language, gestures and facial expressions convey messages;
- although all had the same script, what variations came through in performance choices;
- what does this exercise mean in terms of how we interpret what we see?

Activity 5.2: What is your dog trying to tell you?

1. Use the Powerpoint to assist with images.
2. Show a few images of dogs and discuss what they might be communicating.
3. (Optional): Have students read the article, “Canine Body Language” and see what ideas this adds to their understanding of what they see. If this reading is challenging for your students, consider breaking it into portions and jigsawing.
4. Introduce a guide to understanding dog’s body language (select the one(s) you’d like students to use based on their level and your goals for the lesson). You might allow students to use the one of their choosing based on their comfort level or compare for ease of use and level of information.
 - Optional: show the Zoom Room Guide to Dog Body Language (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+00_9JPitXHI), a visual guide of facial expressions and posture explained. This video has no sound and could be a resource for students to study at home.
5. Revisit the images and have students check their interpretation of the dog’s communication.
6. Show video clips of dog behavior. Have students determine what the dog is communicating in each video.
7. Have students read, “Fair Play” and discuss what they see when dogs are playing:
 - What do dogs learn from playing?
 - Why are videos used by scientists to better understand dog-play? How does new technology help scientists do this kind of study?
 - How is play important for animals and humans to play?
 - How does play help animals and people explore the limits of socially appropriate behavior?
 - What aspects of the environment could affect play?

Optional extensions:

8. Students might video their own dogs or dogs they know and analyze the video for visible behaviors.
9. Students can determine the personality of the dog they observe based on an analysis of their behaviors.
10. Students can set up an experiment where dogs are given the same stimuli (someone comes to the door) and their responses are video-taped and analyzed for patterns.
11. Students can video dogs at play under different conditions (at a dog park, in one’s yard, inside one’s home, at a dog play area) to research the similarities and differences in dog behavior. How do the dogs determine the limits of acceptable behavior?
12. Students might research behavioral studies as a basis for designing their own. See “Ethogram of dog-human interaction” for information to get students started on their own research.

Concluding the Lesson:

1. Talk about the assumptions we make based on facial expressions and gestures.
RP Discuss how this could create barriers between people and brainstorm ways to get through such barriers.
2. Given how difficult it can be to infer what people are telling you based on their body language, how does this get more complicated when trying to communicate with babies? What about people who speak a different language and interpret gestures differently? What could you do to build communication bridges?
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3. Discuss the importance of play and the role it holds in students' lives. What do they learn from play? What would society be like if play wasn't allowed?