



Animal-Assisted **Interactions** (AAI)

Most children have positive feelings about animals—they love to pet them, read about them, draw them and tell stories about the pets in their lives, both real and imaginary!

There is no doubt that contact with pets and other animals can help develop nurturing behavior in children. Learning that animals have feelings, just as we do, can be a huge step toward developing empathy in children. However, children are not the only ones who can benefit from interactions with pets. Everyone benefits from these interactions, senior citizens and people with disabling conditions do as well.

Health care and social welfare professionals have developed programs for their clients and patients based on the bond between people and animals. Contact with an animal may be a healthy experience, both physically and psychologically. Residents of extended care facilities can benefit tremendously from the presence of a sociable pet. A purring cat, curled up in the lap of an elderly person, can provide important therapy. We are still learning just how beneficial such relationships can be. A pet can reduce loneliness, provide opportunities for residents to interact with each other and spark wonderful memories of childhood pets. Not only do animals help create positive feelings, but studies have demonstrated that there are true physical benefits to human and animal interactions. Socializing with animals may lower blood pressure, steady heart rates and result in endorphins being released into the blood stream.



There are different types of animal-assisted interactions. Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) is goal oriented. From having a pet assist in physical therapy sessions to helping a child improve his or her reading skills, well-trained, registered animals of all types can provide therapy. For example, in the classroom, a registered Pet Partner team may be invited to help a student who is experiencing reading difficulties. The teacher or school's reading specialist may work with the team, consisting of an animal (usually a dog or a cat) and a human partner, to identify which students might benefit from this therapy. They meet with the



team to discuss goals and strategies. The team then visits the student at his school weekly with the goal of reading a book. A child who may be shy and lack confidence in reading aloud will read to the animal—a non-judgmental, cuddly friend. Goals are set for the child, and the pet therapy team helps the child to accomplish them.

Animals may also be used in the classroom for animal-assisted activities (AAA). Again, although the goal is to provide fun and enrichment to students, the Pet Partner team is still a trained unit and registered by either the Delta Society or another certifying organization (e.g., Therapy Dogs International). Animal-assisted activities in the classroom may include a “show & tell” about the animal, their needs, allowing students to read to the animals. In this case, however therapeutic goals are not set, rather, the reading is for enjoyment and pleasure.

Another example of an animal-assisted activity is experiencing the sense of pleasure an animal’s company provides. Imagine a family with a seriously ill child. Many hours are spent on hospital visits and seeing to the needs of their child. However, other children in the family may be feeling somewhat neglected. These siblings need attention and reassurance. Imagine this disheartened child when a registered therapy dog team walks in the hospital room and asks if he is interested in visiting. The team will reach out to all members of a family in crisis—including the members that are not sick. A

therapy dog visit can change the energy in the room. Everyone gets a chance to pet the dog and feel his tail-wagging. Visits like this can help the entire family to relax and smile.

Horses can provide great opportunities for both animal-assisted therapy as well as animal-assisted activities. Therapeutic riding programs are used to help children and adults with a disabling condition develop not only confidence, but balance, flexibility and muscle strength. The North American Riding for the Handicapped Association (NAHRA) set standards for safe, professional and ethical riding practices throughout the United States and Canada.

It is never too soon to involve youth in volunteer activities. Volunteering with a pet is a great motivator for kids and animal-assisted activities may be a wonderful venue through which one may learn empathy and compassion. There are some terrific, well-written books your students may enjoy reading about animal-assisted therapy and activities. Some titles are *Parrots Don't Make Housecalls* by Trina Weibe and *Creature Comfort: Animals That Heal* by Bernie Graham, for young adults.

There are animal-assisted therapy teams at work volunteering in almost every community. A call to your local shelter or animal welfare organization may yield a pet partner team who will enjoy to visiting your school and speaking to your students about the benefits and rewards of animal-assisted therapy and activities.





Activity Sheet 1 K-2

Many people only think of dogs when they think of therapy animals. While dogs are very common in the animal-assisted therapy field, there are many other animals that possess the desired personality traits and physical abilities necessary to help people in need. This activity will serve to introduce your students to AAT and AAA and broaden the ideas they might have about what types of animals can be involved in therapeutic activities for humans, and in what capacity.

In this activity, students will read four different scenarios about specific therapy animals, and the people they serve. Ask your students to read the four scenarios (or read them aloud, depending on grade level and reading ability). Afterwards, students will choose one of the animals described and draw a picture of that animal helping the human. Below their picture, or on a separate sheet of paper, ask your students to write about how the animal helped the person in the story, and how they might feel if it were them.

For older children, consider having them draw and write about each of the four scenarios, rather than choosing just one.

Assist them in fastening their pages together to make a booklet about the amazing work of therapy animals in our communities.



STANDARDS:

NCTE English Language Arts #1:
Reading for Perspective

NCTE English Language Arts # 4:
Communications Skills

NSAE Arts Education #1:
Understanding and Applying Media,
Techniques, and Processes

Activity Sheet 2 Grades 3-8



Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) is becoming more popular and widespread within the health and medical fields, yet most people aren't familiar with most aspects of AAT. For this lesson, students have an opportunity to learn about AAT and present their information to the public. This lesson can be done individually or as a group.

Depending on grade level, students can both research AAT and interview either a local Pet Partner or a staff member at a facility that utilizes AAT. Depending on availability, you may also invite a local Pet Partner to your classroom for a presentation and discussion.

Students will begin by visiting the Delta Society website and answering four questions on AAT. All questions can be answered from this website. If students have difficulty finding the information, here are the links that have answer the questions.

www.deltasociety.org/AnimalsFAQFAQ.htm
www.deltasociety.org/AnimalsHealthGeneralGeneral.htm
www.deltasociety.org/VolunteerAboutAbout.htm
www.deltasociety.org/VolunteerAboutStep1.htm

Once students have gathered their research, they can write an article for the school bulletin board, newspaper or local publication, including a newsletter for an AAT facility.

STANDARDS:

NCTE English Language Arts #4:
Communication Skills

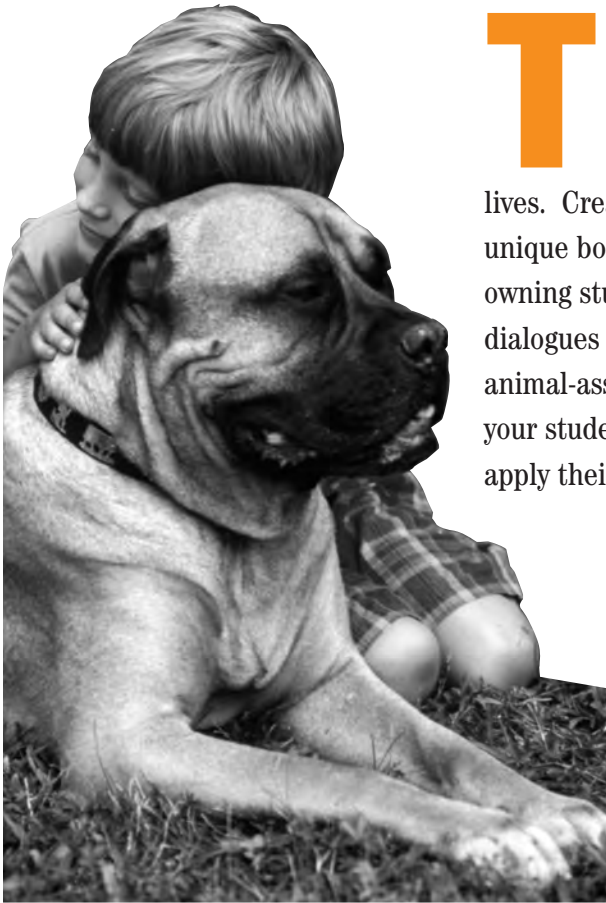
NCTE English Language Arts #5:
Communication Strategies

NCTE English Language Arts #6:
Applying Knowledge

NCTE English Language Arts #8:
Research Skills



Activity Sheet 3 Grades 6-8



The human-animal bond is very real and very powerful. Bonding with animals provides tangible positives for people and society. Encourage students to think about their relationships with animals, and how those relationships have had a positive impact on their lives. Creating posters and pictures for classroom display showing their unique bond and friendships with animals may help encourage non-pet owning students to understand the importance of these relationships, opening dialogues between students of different backgrounds. Further investigating animal-assisted therapy opportunities within the community helps prepare your students for interactions beyond the classroom, and brings the chance to apply their knowledge in real life settings.

STANDARDS:

NCTE English Language Arts #4:
Communication Skills

NCTE English Language Arts #5:
Communication Strategies

NCTE English Language Arts #8:
Research Skills

NAEA Visual Arts #1:
Understanding and Applying Media,
Techniques, and Processes



Activity Sheet 4 Grades 3-8



Students can try their hand at writing fictional short stories using terms they acquired while learning about animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and animal-assisted activities (AAA). Students may obtain the necessary definitions from a number of websites, including those provided. They may then incorporate that information into their short stories.

STANDARDS:

NCTE English Language Arts #4:
Communication Skills

NCTE English Language Arts # 5:
Communication Strategies

NCTE English Language Arts #6:
Applying Knowledge





The Special Work of Therapy Animals

Read the following stories about different therapy animals and the ways in which they help people. Choose your favorite one and draw a picture of that story. Under your drawing, or on a separate sheet of paper, write a paragraph about how the animal helped the person in that story, and how you might feel if you were that person.

Suzie is nine years old. She has a disabling condition that keeps her in a wheelchair because she can't walk on her own. Once a week she visits a stable and gets to ride a horse named Comet. Comet is a therapy horse who is trained to move very slowly and carefully when a person with a disabling condition is on his back. When Suzie is riding Comet, his stride makes Suzie feel like she is walking!



Jose just celebrated his sixth birthday, but couldn't have a birthday party because he is very sick and in the hospital. He isn't allowed to have his friends visit him, but he did get a birthday visit from someone very special. Buddy is a therapy dog who visits children who are sick. Buddy paid a special visit to Jose, and was even wearing a party hat! Having Buddy around made Jose forget he was sick for a little while, and made his birthday very happy. Buddy even gave him a "high five" handshake before he left.



Most of the students in Mrs. Lee's first grade class don't have pets at home. Some are even afraid of animals because they've never been around them. One day Mrs. Lee's class is visited by Ann, a humane educator (someone who teaches children about animals and how to care for and be kind to them) and Ann's guinea pig, Chewy. The children in the class learned all about guinea pigs and they all took turns petting Chewy – even the ones who used to be afraid!



Rose is an elderly woman who lives in a nursing home. She has lots of friends in the home, but some days Rose wakes up feeling lonely and sad. On Tuesdays and Fridays, Rose gets a visit from Honey, a therapy cat. Honey sits on Rose's lap and purrs while Rose strokes her soft fur. On the days that Honey comes to visit, Rose always has a smile on her face.

Did you have a hard time choosing a favorite story because you liked all of them? Draw a picture of all four stories, and write a paragraph about all of the therapy animals you've drawn. Ask your teacher to help you fasten them together and you've got your very own booklet about amazing therapy animals!



Investigative Reporter - What is Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT)?

You can answer the following questions by searching the Delta Society's website at deltasociety.org



What is AAT?

What are the health benefits of AAT?

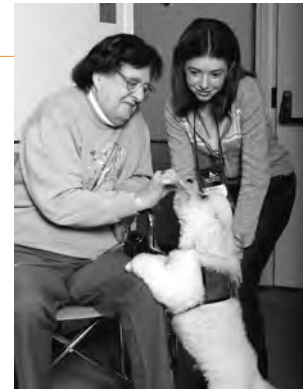
What is the Pet Partner Program?

What training is necessary to become a Pet Partner?

Contact a local hospital, nursing home or health care facility to see if a Pet Partner team works at their facility. Ask for a short interview with the Pet Partner team or a staff member of a hospital/nursing home/health care facility. If you are able to interview someone, here are a few questions to ask. Can you think of a few more?

Questions for a Pet Partner

- 1) Why and how did you become part of a Pet Partner team?
- 2) What is the best part of working as a Pet Partner?
- 3) Are there any stories about your experience working as a Pet Partner that you would like to share?



Questions for Staff Member

- 1) How did your facility become involved with AAT?
- 2) What benefits have you witnessed among the patients in your facility who have received AAT?
- 3) Are there any AAT stories that occurred in your facility that you would like to share?

When you have gathered all of your information, write an article for your school bulletin board, newspaper or local publication, including a newsletter for an AAT facility.



Human-Animal Bond

Animal-Assisted Therapy and Interactions work because of the very special bond between people and animals. This is known as the Human/Animal Bond.

The human-animal bond goes beyond normal companionship and friendship. It refers to the strong positive interaction that exists between humans and animals — the special bond that actually enhances quality of life. Promoting human-animal interactions leads to positive benefits for all members of the community.



Here are just a few examples of how bonding with an animal can help people.



- Pet owners feel less afraid of being a victim of crime when walking with a dog or sharing a residence with a dog.
- Pet owners have fewer minor health problems.
- Pet owners have better psychological well-being.
- Pet owners have shorter hospital stays.
- Contact with pets develops nurturing behavior in children who may grow to be more nurturing adults.

Think of a very special animal in your life. Does a bond exist between you and your pet? Between you and a relative or friend's pet? How has your pet helped you become a better person? Create posters for your classroom, showing how your special animal has helped you, or someone you love.

Extension activity:



- Consider whether your pet has what it takes to be a therapy animal.
- Investigate what it takes to become a therapy animal.
- Visit delta.org, therapydogsinternational.com or others you may know.
- Learn of training opportunities in your area and how to become an animal-assisted interactions (AAI) team. If you and your pet become a AAI team, make your own school one of your first stops!

