

OverPOMpulation



Focus: This lesson will show students how quickly populations of animal can grow, and will lead to discussions on solutions to the pet overpopulation crisis.

Age Level: All

Prerequisite: None

Time: 60 Minutes

Number of Participants: Whole Class

Number of Educators/Assistants: 1/1

Prep: Gather materials

Materials:

- Brown lunch bags (1 per pair)
- Many Poms (stored in brown bags)
- Labeled Buckets (Shelters, ACC, Rescues, Friends)

Animals:

- None

Instructional Objectives: Students will be able to define overpopulation, spaying, neutering, and euthanasia age-appropriately. Students will learn how pet overpopulation occurs and understand spaying and neutering is one of the best ways to help prevent animal overpopulation and to also reduce the number of animals euthanized each year.

Environmental Objectives: Students should work cooperatively together, use materials respectfully, and be engaged in the discussion.

Procedure:

Introduction:

- ♥ Have students define "overpopulation".
 - Overpopulation, in our example, means "too many animals". (Over = too much/too many, Population = a group of people or animals). There are more animals that need homes than there are homes for.
 - Overpopulation = too many of a type of animal/people for the place they live in and the resources available (ie: housing, food, etc).
- ♥ *How can there be too many animals? (Everyone loves kittens and puppies!)*
 - Take guesses from the children (i.e.: breeding, buying not adopting, not spaying/neutering our pets, etc.)
- ♥ *What happens to the animals when there are too many?*

Lesson adapted from the San Francisco SPCA.

- Take guesses again. Ex: They become homeless. They are sent to shelters.
- ♥ *What are some other reasons animals might end up in shelters or homeless?* (The aim of this question is to get the students thinking about real reasons why animals end up in shelters. There are so many reasons that have nothing to do with anything the animal has done – life happened to them.)
 - Someone lost a job. A family can't bring their pet with them to their new home. More costly than they thought. New baby in the home. Not knowing how to deal with behavior issues (that class could help with). Etc.
- ♥ What are some things we can do to prevent overpopulation?

Take guesses, such as:

 - Adopt, don't buy (from a breeder or pet store)
 - Spay and neuter!
 - Optional additional information:
 - Which operation do the females have (spay)? The males (neuter)?
 - Surgeries prevent animals from having babies.
 - Spaying prevents cancers that kill 90% of cats and 50% of dogs that are not altered
 - All Iowa shelters and rescues spay/neuter prior to adoptions; most in US as well
 - Surgery is quick! Between 4 minutes (for small males) and 30 minutes (for large females)
 - Pretty safe surgery. Animals are asleep during the procedure, feel better within hours, and are fully recovered after a week

Body:

1. Assign the students into pairs.
2. Give one partner a brown bag filled with poms. (The other partner will cup their hands to receive the poms.)
3. Explain that each pom represents a pet, and the students' cupped hands represent a typical home in the U.S. The student with the bag of poms will pass them into their partners' hands as you tell the story. The students holding the poms are trying to hold all the poms in their hands without allowing them to overflow and spill to the floor – they don't want to smash the poms either, though! They are pets!
 - a. Students with cupped hands can hold their hands over the table so they don't spill the poms onto the floor.

4. Tell students that an unaltered (non-spayed) female cat can get pregnant as early as 4 months and can begin having kittens at 6 months old. Cats can give birth to an average of 6 kittens per litter every 2.5 months! That adds up to a lot of cats if no one is being spayed or neutered.
5. **Story:** A family adopts a cat and they name her Lulu. (**Put one pom into parter's hands.**) The family loves Lulu very much, but – oh no! – they didn't spay her! Lulu has her first litter of **6 kittens** (pass poms).
 - a. Three months pass, Lulu still isn't spayed, and she has **4 more kittens** (pass).
 - b. A few more months pass, it is now springtime, also known as "kitten season", and Lulu has **4 more kittens, and her first litter of 6 kittens have 5 kittens each!** (How many is that? $6 \times 5 = 30 + 4 = 34$). Campers hand over 34 poms).
 - c. Several more months pass, none of the cats or kittens have been spayed, **so Lulu has 5 more kittens (pause); her first litter of 6 kittens have 5 kittens each** ($6 \times 5 = 30$) (pause), **and her second litter of 4 kittens has 6 kittens each** ($4 \times 6 = 24$) (pause).
 - d. Fall is around the corner, the leaves change colors, and more kittens are born. Lulu has another **litter of 4 (pause)**, Lulu's first **2 litters of 6 kittens and 4 kittens all have 6 kittens each** ($6 \times 6 = 36$, $4 \times 6 = 24$) (pause), and Lulu's kittens' kittens (**litter of 5**) **have 3 kittens each** ($5 \times 3 = 15$).
6. It's only been one year, and there are already many, many cats living in Lulu's house. *Can this many cats live in one home? (No!) Is this the number of cats the family wanted to have? (No.)*
7. You can quickly share that unaltered cats are driven by their hormones and tend to sneak outdoors primarily in search of a mate. Mating just once can start a domino effect that can result, as they just witnessed, in dozens or even thousands of animals.
8. All pairs place their poms onto center of their table. *We need to find homes for all these cats and kittens, since the family only wanted their one cat, Lulu.*
9. *Where can these cats and kittens go?* Take ideas. As students give ideas, go around to each group and take a handful of poms from each group's pile and put them in the designated bucket.
 - Shelters: have space to take a dozen or so
 - Private rescues: can take another dozen
 - Friends, neighbors, other neighborhoods: a few more. Your neighbors already have the number of pets they want. Everyone in other neighborhoods and states have the same problem.
 - Where else can they go?*

For K, 1st, and 2nd graders: there is just nowhere else for them to go. These animals will not be able to find a home. We want every cat and dog to have a home. This is why spaying and neutering is so important. If a student does bring up “putting to sleep”, you can agree that unfortunately sometimes that does happen, and move on.

For 3rd graders and up: explain (if not already mentioned) “putting to sleep” or euthanasia. Ask campers if they know what “euthanasia” means. It means a “good death”. It’s ending an animal’s life as kindly as possible, so they don’t feel scared or pain. Talk about how adoptathons and foster homes allow us to free up kennel space and care for more animals.

- ♥ Optional: An animal is given two shots. One shot makes them sleep, just like before you have a surgery so they don’t feel anything. The second shot slows everything down, including their heart, until it stops and they die.
- ♥ Unfortunately, 4 million cats and dogs are euthanized each year because there are more animals than there are homes for and there is nowhere for these animals to live.
- ♥ At the ARL we are very fortunate because we don’t have to euthanize animals due to lack of space. Every animal we take in will stay with us, as long as it takes, until we find the right home for him or her. The only circumstances we euthanize animals in are 1) if they are very sick or are suffering (in pain) and we cannot make them better or 2) they have extreme behavior issues.

Debrief:

- ♥ *What can we do to help solve the problem of overpopulation?*
 - Spay and neuter our pets!
 - Adopt, don’t buy
 - Share your knowledge with others so they can make informed choices