

Animals and the early years curriculum

England

Animals are a fascinating and challenging topic. When planning animal topics into the curriculum, think about ways of encouraging children to think about animals' needs and develop a sense of care and responsibility towards them.

The six areas of learning and some of the early learning goals are detailed here, together with practical and interactive activity ideas for incorporating animal welfare into the early years curriculum.

RSPCA Education has a range of teaching resources suitable for early years. Visit the education section of the RSPCA's website for more details – www.rspca.org.uk



Personal, social
and emotional
development

Communication,
language and
literacy

Mathematical
development

Animal welfare education


Creative
development

Physical
development



Knowledge and
understanding
of the world

Personal, social and emotional development

Early learning goals	Lesson plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Maintains attention, concentrates and sits quietly when appropriate. ■ Understands what is right and wrong and why. 	<p>Find a story where an animal is treated unfairly through no fault of their own. Read your chosen story then invite the children to share their favourite parts of the story, encouraging them to explain why. Ask them to think about parts of the story that made the animal (and them) feel sad.</p> <hr/> <p>Sit in a circle with the children and pass around a soft toy animal. Invite the children to take turns sharing a sad or unhappy experience. Explain that we don't enjoy being bullied, treated cruelly or unfairly and neither do animals.</p> <hr/> <p>Read out a selection of 'right' and 'wrong' animal welfare statements and ask the children to take turns telling you whether they think the statements are right or good or wrong or bad. This can be an oral game where children put their hands up to answer or a recording game where children are invited to mark a tick or a cross next to the pictures illustrating the statements. Some examples of statements could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ animals should not be fed ■ animals need love ■ animals do not need exercise ■ animals need water ■ animals hate playing. 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Has a developing respect for his/her own cultures and beliefs and those of other people. ■ Has a developing awareness of own needs, views and feelings and is sensitive to the needs, views and feelings of others. 	<p>Design and make a role-play corner and/or display table with the children. Invite the children to contribute as much as possible – by bringing in an animal soft toy, an animal story, a picture or poster of an animal – so that they feel they have ownership of their animal play area. It could be a cattery, stable, kennels, vets, farm or wild animal habitat. Ask the children whether or not they think the animals in their care will be comfortable – do they have something to eat, drink, play with?</p> <hr/> <p>Suggest practical, play-orientated activities that encourage the children to think about and practically carry out caring for the animals. For instance make a rota for the children to be the vet, play with the animals, feed them, water them, exercise them so that all of their needs are met every day.</p> <hr/> <p>Choose an appropriate place for an enjoyable and safe nature walk around your school grounds, the local park or sea side. Help the children to predict what animals they might see on the walk.</p> <p>Give the children a record sheet you have prepared and photocopied with a range of animals that you are likely to see on the walk clearly represented. The children can colour them in when they spot the animal or put a tick next to the animal they have spotted. Try to follow up the walk with a practical activity that is related in some way. For instance, make a robin if you observe one on a Christmas term nature walk.</p> <hr/> <p>Discuss what happens to birds and other animals in the winter and ways in which you can help them to find food. Make monkey nut strings by threading wool through them with a needle. Ask the children to record how many birds they spot eating from their garden each day when they take their monkey nut strings home to hang up.</p>

Communication, language and literacy

Early learning goals	Lesson plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is able to enjoy listening to and using spoken and written language, and readily turns it into play and learning. 	<p>Put a range of small soft toys in a feely box. Explain to the children that you have some animal friends in school today. They are very shy and will only come out if the children can guess their correct animal name. Describe the animal to the children and ask them to guess what kind of animal it is. Bring the animal out and pass it around when the children have guessed correctly. After your demonstration, invite the children to take turns choosing, describing and talking about an animal without saying its name. The child who guesses correctly wins a turn.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is able to use talk to organize, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events. ■ Retells narratives in the correct sequence, drawing on the language patterns of stories. 	<p>Find a video, story or poster which talks about an animal life cycle such as a frog or butterfly. After watching a video, reading the story or discussing the poster, help the children to identify with such changes by comparing how they have changed from a baby to now. Discuss and record things that the children could and couldn't do as babies that they can and can't do now. Prepare a worksheet or concertina booklet for the children to sequence correctly the life cycle of a butterfly, frog, bird or other animal of your choice.</p>



Mathematical development

Early learning goals	Lesson plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is able to count reliably up to ten every day objects. 	<p>Discuss and predict possible dangers to animals in your locality by looking at a poster or story together. Take the children on a pollution patrol around your school or to a local park. Ask the children to look for and draw any dangers they can see which may harm animals – like traffic and litter. Encourage the children to number their work one, two, three, and so on to practise writing numbers. Count each child's findings when you share the results together back in class.</p> <p>Demonstrate how to record the whole group's findings on a simple graph by collating all of the information together to produce a visual aid of local dangers to animals. Finally, ask the children if there is anything they can do to help. Record the children's ideas and solutions all around the graph to illustrate how we can all play a part in helping to make and maintain a safer environment for animals and ourselves.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In practical activities and in discussion is beginning to use the vocabulary involved in addition and subtraction. 	<p>Sing and act out an animal action rhyme or song before focusing particularly on the mathematical concept you wish to draw out. Illustrate the action rhyme as visually as possible by inviting the children to enjoy role-play. For example with <i>Five little ducks</i> choose volunteers to play the part of the five little ducks and mother duck. This will help the children to actually see the subtraction within the rhyme in a concrete way. Finally discuss the different ways baby animals stay close to their parents. Invite the children to say why they think this is. Encourage them to think about protection, warmth, love and comfort.</p>



Knowledge and understanding of the world

Early learning goals	Lesson plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Observes, finds out about, and identifies features in the place he/she lives and the natural world. 	<p>Ask the children to observe part of the school grounds – maybe a tree or a bush. What animals do the children sometimes see there? Make a list of all the animals the children have seen. Ask them to draw a simple picture of the bush including the animals that live there. Talk about why the animals enjoy living in that particular place. How are the animals’ needs being met? What do they have to eat, drink and sleep on?</p> <hr/> <p>Gather pictures, posters, books and photographs about animals from the children’s own experiences. Talk about the role of guide dogs, police dogs, sheepdogs, farmers, RSPCA inspectors and vets. Ask the children to imagine that they are going to work with and look after animals when they grow up. What animals would they most enjoy working with and why? Invite them to paint or draw their choice with a little writing to explain if possible.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Begins to know about his/her own culture and beliefs and those of other people. 	<p>Explain to the children that animals play an important part in religion and what different people believe. Tell them that there are many faith stories from all over the world with animals in them and that you will be looking at one or two today. Explore a Christian story looking at the role of the dove and why it is regarded as a symbol of peace today and then look at the sacred cow in Hinduism. Using a template cut out a dove, paint with white paint, mixed with glue, and sprinkle silver glitter on to the tips of the wings. Once dry, hang the dove as a mobile from the ceiling. Using a large template of a cow, invite the children to print hands on to it using vibrant and colourful paints.</p>



Physical development

Early learning goals	Lesson plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Moves with confidence, imagination and in safety. ■ Moves with control and coordination. ■ Shows awareness of space, of themselves and others. 	<p>Ask the children to think of an animal that moves very slowly like a slug, snail, tortoise or worm. Encourage them to move around the room pretending to be their chosen animal. Tell them you want to see relevant movements such as sliding, stomping and crawling.</p> <p>Now ask the children to imagine they are a fast animal like a cheetah, leopard, spider, squirrel or rabbit. Tell them to move around the room, using the spaces and taking care not to bump into anyone, just like their chosen fast animal. Ask the children why they think some animals move quickly and others move slowly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is able to travel around, under, over and through balancing and climbing equipment. 	<p>Create an obstacle course, dividing the children into four main activities to focus on practising different skills. Explain to the children that each area represents a different animal habitat such as: a jungle made with a climbing frame, bench, mats and ropes; a field for lambs and rabbits to play in, created using mats, a trampoline and skipping ropes; a desert for snakes, reptiles and camels to move through, using benches and mats to slide and roll along; a comfortable home with a pretend fire to roll and stretch out in front of for cats, dogs and pets, using mats, cushions and hoops. Talk about how different animals live in different kinds of habitats. After the children have played at being animals happy in their habitat, ask them what they think would happen if one of the habitats was taken away.</p>



Creative development

Early learning goals	Lesson plans
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Uses his/her imagination in art and design, music, dance, imaginative and role-play stories. 	<p>Provide some template animal masks and a selection of appropriate materials that the children can choose from to collage, colour or paint their animal masks. Encourage the children to talk about what materials they plan to use and how they are going to attach their materials to the masks. Allow them to begin the textured collage. Once dry, attach elastic for the children to be able to wear the masks. When the children put on the masks, ask them to think about all the things they need to be happy and healthy as an animal. Working in pairs, ask one child to take on the role of the person caring for the animal, and the other to take on the role of the animal. How is the carer going to look after their animal? Ask the children to act this out.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Expresses and communicates his/her ideas, thoughts and feelings by using a widening range of materials, suitable tools, imaginative and role-play, movement, designing and making and a variety of songs and musical instruments. 	<p>Sing <i>If you are happy and you know it</i>. Ask the children to think about a particular farm animal and to think about all the things the animal needs to be happy. Ask the children to act out each thing. Make a list on the board. Sing the song again asking the children to say the words and do the actions as you go.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Respond in a variety of ways to what they see, hear, smell, touch and feel. 	<p>Take the children outside into the playground and ask them to close their eyes. When everyone is quiet, ask them to listen very carefully and see how many different noises they can hear? How many of these are animal noises? Even in urban areas you may be able to hear birds singing, bees buzzing or dogs barking. Ask the children to think about all the different ways animals come into their lives – from spiders in the corner of the classroom to their favourite animals on television. Ask the children to think about why animals are so important to us.</p>



Wilberforce Way
Southwater, Horsham
West Sussex RH13 9RS
Tel: 0870 010 1181

www.rspca.org.uk

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