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A Partnership in Nebraska with the Humane Society

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*We cannot seek or attain health, wealth,
learning, justice or kindness in general.
Action is always specific, concrete, individualized, unique.*
John Dewey

Perhaps service-learning continues to grow as an effective pedagogy in colleges of education because it offers everyone involved an opportunity to put words into action. With the news full of stories of bullying and school shootings, teachers and teacher candidates look for someone to help them make sense of what feels to be a growing trend of cruelty. Perhaps it is a natural reaction for teachers to want to do something positive in the face of brutality. Perhaps our wanting to be proactive corresponds to whatever drew us to education in the first place. Regardless of the cause, four literacy professors used the vehicle of service-learning to challenge their graduate and undergraduate students to consider issues of bullying, brutality and cruelty.



While the literature supports the connection between cruelty to animals and brutality to people, (Merz-Perez and Heide, 2003; Arluke, Levin, Luke, and Ascione, 1999) as former classroom teachers we knew that often students need to consider sensitive issues such as bullying and aggression from multiple perspectives in order to comprehend and analyze the causes and repercussions of personal violence. Simply put, when students are living in a world where they are surrounded by violent images, acts and ideas, they may need to see their world through different eyes in order to be critical consumers of their realities. Considering how four legged creatures are treated may help us to consider how we treat two legged ones.

Because the heart of service-learning is to serve an identified need of a community agency, we first met with the Nebraska Humane Society to identify their goals and objectives and to see how we could work in a symbiotic relationship. After a series of meetings where we considered the humane society's history and current mission we realized that we needed to stop the spread of troubling but popular concepts portrayed in books such as *The Incredible Journey* where three strays manage to trek across the country to find their owners. Many teachers may unintentionally be using fictionalized accounts of pets to spread misinformation to unknowing children. Replacing these texts with ones furthering the mission of the Nebraska Humane Society became one of our goals. As our literacy classes typically require our students to locate and select appropriate materials for P-12 students, altering our typical assignments was an easy adjustment.

In addition to asking our teacher candidates and teachers to identify materials so we could create a booklist of animal and child friendly texts supporting the mission of the humane society, we wanted to put these books into the hands of area kids. Faculty involved in the Humane Education service-learning initiative were awarded a \$3000 grant from the University of Nebraska Omaha's Service Learning Office to purchase multiple copies of all titles on the collective booklist. The Nebraska Humane Society has a full time Humane Educator who works closely with both public and private schools to educate students, teachers and parents on the responsibilities that come with pet ownership. The Humane Educator will use the new titles with a diverse array of audiences in schools to highlight the need for compassion and kindness toward all living things. Now, in addition to talking about the books on the list, Humane Educators can now leave a few books after each visit. Having the book list was important, but putting appropriate books directly in the hands of children took the good intention and made it a good action.

A second goal that emerged from the meetings was to enable humane society personnel to provide activities and materials to teachers and agencies to support the appropriate books. In this era of No Child Left Behind, P-16 coursework is driven by standards and our teacher education literacy classes are no exception. Many states and teacher preparation institutions have adopted standards from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) for teacher candidates and National Board Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) for teachers. Each of our four classes has identified INTASC or NBPTS standards to prepare our teacher candidates and teachers for the realities of today's classroom. In looking at our course standards and syllabi, it was clear that our standards could be met by including literature and assignments centered on the mission of the humane society.

Just as our coursework is centered on standards, we recognized the role of standards in P-12 schools. Many teachers feel pressured to avoid having guest speakers, such as those from the humane society, because the time may typically be taken away from standards-based learning. Because the mission of the Nebraska Humane Society can be tied to state standards, we decided to ask our teachers and teacher candidates to create standards based lesson plans. Having these lessons and activities may empower teachers to include books from our supplied booklist rather than assuming their inclusion would take time away from the necessary focus on standardized assessment.

As the courses started, we were armed with our two goals of creating a book list to purchase books and creating standards-based lesson plans to meet the stated needs of our community partner. What we had forgotten was how dedicated teachers can be when they realize that their university coursework has a purpose beyond the walls of the college classroom. Each of the four university classes started the project by touring the Nebraska Humane Society to gain a deeper understanding and appreciate of the mission of the organization as well as to create individualized ideas for books and materials. For example, one teacher learned about the psychology behind the fact of how black dogs are often ignored or overlooked by prospective adopters. Her immediate response was to imagine an activity mirroring the lesson as applied to issues of race. In addition to brainstorming possible connections, some of the teacher candidates, teachers and even one professor adopted a new pet after touring the facility.

Each professor developed assignments geared toward meeting the needs of all parties involved. Students needed to first find an appropriate book that matched the philosophy of the Nebraska Humane Society. Then they developed activities with connections to the standards applicable to the grade level they were preparing the materials for. (See example of assignment in Appendix A.) Since these materials were to be used by The Nebraska Humane Society, there was a real audience and purpose for these lesson preparations. As each class developed their lessons and made book selections, the bibliography of books was developed (Appendix B). In addition, all of the lessons were burned to a CD and all students received a copy of all of the lessons. The new books and lesson plan CDs were given to the Humane Society for their work with students and other stakeholders in K-12 schools.

After touring the Nebraska Humane Society, exploring children's and young adult literature focused on humane treatment of animals, and creating lesson plans, graduate and undergraduate students involved with the project reflected on their service learning experiences. Students' reflections, lesson plans, and in-class sharing provided evidence for our analysis of project impact on students. In particular, evidence demonstrated that students (a) considered standards in new ways, (b) explored ways to connect their own students to real-world problems, and (c) created lesson plans not only for their use in the classroom, but also to be used by their peers in the Omaha area.

One new consideration of standards, reported by students, was with regard to "inquiry" and "communication of ideas" and how they are found as standards in several disciplines. The National Research Council (1996, 2000) promotes inquiry and communicating findings to others as core to science teaching and learning. Standards for reading and the language arts also support inquiry and communicating ideas in standard seven (NCTE & IRA, 1996).

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience. (p. 3)

Because students in one class were encouraged to focus the Nebraska Humane Society lesson plans on science-related content, students focused solely on science standards and had not considered inquiry as even remotely related to reading and language arts standards. Through class discussions and further exploration of standards, students realized that the Nebraska Humane Society lesson planning assignment offered opportunities to cross disciplines and address not only science content and science inquiry, but also literacy skills (asking a question, finding information, communicating ideas). The lesson plans, resources and information are all easily integrated into content curriculum and fit well into local character education programs. Overall, the students described the project as valuable to both themselves and to the community.

The benefits garnered from service-learning projects like this one to a community are many. These projects increase the likelihood of participation by students in other community projects and foster future leaders for humanitarian efforts and initiatives. The community will continue to be well-served by both the specific resources donated to the Nebraska Humane Society and through the involvement of these student-citizens in activities that promote the development of positive, ethical, and compassionate dispositions through service.

References

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Merz-Perez, L. & Heide, K. M. (2003) *Animal cruelty: Pathway to violence against people*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

National Research Council. (1996). *National science education standards*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

National Research Council. (2000). *Inquiry and the national science education standards: A guide for teaching and learning*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Appendix A: Service Learning Project Packet Example

Grade Level of Packet: 2-6

Book: Orloff, K. K. (2004). *I wanna iguana*. Ill. by David Catrow. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

How Book Fits Humane Society Mission/Philosophy: Alex shows that he understands the responsibilities that go along with having a pet as he tries to convince his mother that he wants a pet.

Summary of book: Through a series of notes between Alex and his mother, Alex tries to convince his mother to let him have an iguana as a pet.

Prereading/Preview of book: (How would you introduce this book?) Look at the cover of the book. Based upon the title and the cover, what do you suppose this book will be about? Why? Why would an iguana be a pet preference? Would you like a pet? Why or why not? What responsibilities go with having a pet? Should all people have pets? Why or why not? Let's read to find out if Alex gets his wish and gets an iguana.

Focus on Six Plus One Traits of Writing:

Ideas: What is the big idea in this book? We learn that Alex wants his friend's baby iguana when his friend moves away and through a series of persuasive notes to his mother, tries to persuade her to let him keep the iguana. Questions for students: How do you think the author got the idea for this book? Do you think the author ever wanted a pet? Why or why not? Do you think the author is a pet owner? Why or why not? Is this a unique idea for a book? Why or why not?

Organization: This is a narrative story of sorts within the format of notes back and forth between Alex and his mother. It starts and ends with notes. Questions for students: Where are the beginning, middle, and end of this story?

Voice: This book is told in two voices – Alex and his mother. Alex's voice is funny and persuasive. Alex's mother's voice is practical and funny too. Questions for students: Which perspective can you relate to the most? Why? What is the voice of the illustrator? What do the illustrations say about Alex and his family? How would this book be different if it were written in a standard narrative format instead of in a series of notes between characters?

Word Choice: Some interesting word choice in this book: sensitive, compassionate, adorable, zillion, mature, lonely, grossed-out, trial basis, responsible, financial wizard. Questions for students: What are some of your favorite words in this book? Why are they your favorites? Why are they effective in this book?

Sentence Structure: There are a variety of different types of sentences and questions in this book. In addition, the closing and signatures of each note usually includes a key word to capture the tone of the note. Question for students: Did you think the closings/signatures (Responsible Alex, Alex the financial wizard, etc.) were effective in capturing the character's tone? Why or why not? The last page of the book shows Alex's reaction to his pet. How did the author show his excitement with words?

Conventions: This is a great book to show the format of notes and to introduce the friendly letter format as well. There are lots of punctuation marks evident in the book as well. Questions for students: Find four different punctuation marks in this book.

Presentation: The cover of the book shows Alex's intentions.

Every page in this book promotes note writing, beginning with the pen and note card paper on the dedication page. Each successive page then shows a note card or piece of paper. Questions for students: How else might the author/illustrator have displayed these notes? Do you think the cover of the book accurately captures the theme of the book? Why or why not?

Writing Activities Tied to Nebraska State Standards:

1. Make a do's and don'ts booklet of caring for an iguana or another pet of your choosing. Research the information first, using nonfiction books about the various animals. This would be assessed on the appropriateness of students' booklets and the focus on responsible pet ownership.

4.2.4 & 8.2.4 *Students will demonstrate the use of multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes.*

4.2.5 & 8.2.5 *Students will demonstrate the use of self-generated questions, note-taking, and summarizing while learning.*

2. Write a persuasive note to your parents/caregiver requesting a particular pet. Remember the important parts of persuasive writing (clear statement of your position, emotive language, facts to back up your request, etc.). This would be assessed on the persuasiveness of the note, the accuracy of facts presented, and general tone of the persuasive piece.

4.2.4 & 8.2.4 *By the end of fourth grade, students will demonstrate the use of multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes.*

3. What happens after Alex receives the iguana? Write an epilogue to the story telling what he learns about the iguana and pet care in general after he has had the iguana for one month. How will Alex show that the iguana will have a home forever? This would be assessed on the appropriateness of the content, and the accuracy of any facts used.

4.2.4 & 8.2.4 *By the end of fourth grade, students will demonstrate the use of multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes.*

4.1.6 & 8.1.4. *Students will identify and apply knowledge of the structure, elements, and literary techniques to analyze fiction.*

4. Write a diamante comparing an iguana to another household pet. Or write a diamante comparing the iguana to Stink's dog, Lurch (see example below). This would be assessed on appropriate word choice and accuracy of facts used in the diamante.

4.2.4 & 8.2.4 *By the end of fourth grade, students will demonstrate the use of multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes.*

Format of diamante:

Noun (iguana)

2 adjectives describing iguana

3 –ing words describing iguana

4 nouns – 2 nouns about iguana, 2 nouns about another pet

3 –ing word describing another pet

2 adjectives describing another pet

Noun (another pet)

Iggy the Iguana

Spiny Scaly

Eating Growing Climbing

Sow Thistle Reptile Dog Food Mammal

Lurking Chasing Barking

Stout Ferocious

Lurch the Dog

5. Make a Top Ten Fact List about iguanas after researching them. Use the related books to help with this research. This would be assessed by the accuracy of the facts and that students wrote them in their own words (so they don't just copy the facts).

4.2.4 & 8.2.4 *By the end of fourth grade, students will demonstrate the use of multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes.*

4.2.5 & 8.2.5 *Students will demonstrate the use of self-generated questions, note-taking, and summarizing while learning.*

6. Add the iguana to the story. Write some notes from the iguana to Alex and/or his mother with facts about caring for an iguana. This would be assessed by the genuineness of the voice of the iguana and the accuracy of any facts included.

4.2.4 & 8.2.4 *By the end of fourth grade, students will demonstrate the use of multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes.*

4.2.5 & 8.2.5 *Students will demonstrate the use of self-generated questions, note-taking, and summarizing while learning.*

4.2.5 & 8.2.5 *Students will demonstrate the use of self-generated questions, note-taking, and summarizing while learning.*

4.1.6 & 8.1.4. *Students will identify and apply knowledge of the structure, elements, and literary techniques to analyze fiction.*

Related Books and Other Resource:

Other fiction books with iguanas:

Compare and contrast these books to *I Wanna Iguana*. How are they similar? Different? What else did you learn about iguanas from these books?

Paul, A. W. (2004). *Manana, Iguana*. Ill. by Ethan Long. New York: Scholastic.

Robbins, J. (2006). *The new girl and me*. Ill. by Matt Phelan. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Nonfiction books about iguanas:

Use these books to use with all of the writing activities.

Donovan, S. (2002) *Iguana*. Orlando, FL: Raintree Steck-Vaughn.

Gutman, B. (2001). *Becoming best friends with your iguana, snake, or turtle*. Ill. by Anne Canevari Green. Brookfield, CT: The Millbrook Press.

Landau, E. (2007). *Your pet iguana*. New York, NY: Children's Press.

Lockwood, S. (2006). *Iguanas*. Mankato, MN: Child's World.

Williams, S. (2001). *101 facts about iguanas*. Strongsville, OH: Gareth Stevens.

Online Sites:

<http://www.greensociety.org/>

<http://www.niad.org/> (National Iguana Awareness Day)

Appendix B: Booklist

Albrecht, K. (2005). *The lost pet chronicles: Adventures of a K-9 cop turned pet detective*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Anderson, L. (2007). *Fight for life*. New York: Puffin.

Bailey, G. (2002). *What is my cat thinking?: The essential guide to understanding pet behavior*. San Diego: Thunder Bay Press.

Banks, J. (2006). *Second chances: Inspiring stories of dog adoption*. New York: Adams Media.

Bentley, D. (2000). *The icky sticky frog*. Santa Monica, CA: Piggy Toes Press.

Bennett, K. (2005). *Not Norman: A goldfish story*. Ill. by Noah Z. Jones. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Birney, B.G. (2004). *The world according to Humphrey*. Ill. By Deirdre Newman. New York: Puffin Books.

Bix, D. (2006). *At the dog park with Sam and Lucy*. Edina, MN: Gryphon Press.

Bonnors, S. (1998). *Why does the cat do that?* New York: Henry and Holt Company.

Brown, L. (1988). *Cruelty to animals: the moral debt*. London: Intl Specialized Book Service Inc.

Bunting, E. (2001). *The summer of Riley*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Calmenson, S. (2007). *May I pet your dog?* New York, NY: Clarion Books.

Calmenson, S. (1998). *Shaggy, waggy dogs and others*. New York: Clarion Books.

Canfield, J., Becker D.V.M, M., Hansen, M. V., & Kline, C. (2005). *Chicken soup for the pet lover's soul: Stories about pets as teachers, healers, heroes, and friends*. New York: Scholastic.

Cannon, J. (1997). *Verdi*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Co.

Carle, E. (1991). *A house for hermit crab*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Coren, S. (2006). *Why do dogs have wet noses?* Ontario, Canada: Kids Can Press.

Crawley, D. (2005). *Cat poems*. Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press, Inc.

DiCamillo, K. (2000). *Because of Winn-Dixie*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Derr, M. (2004). *Dog's Best Friend: Annals of the Dog-Human Relationship*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Dewin, H. (2006). *Why are dogs' noses wet?* New York: Scholastic Inc.

Dromgoole, G. (1999). *What dogs teach us: Life's lessons learned from our best friends*. New York: Willow Creek Press.

Dye, D. & Beckloff M. (2000). *Amazing Gracie: A dog's tale*. New York: Workman Publishing and Company.

Farish, T. (2007). *The Cat Who Liked Potato Soup* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Flake, S. (2000). *The Skin I'm In*. New York: Hyperion Press.

Fleming, Denise. (2003). *Buster*. New York: Scholastic Inc.

Fordham, K. (2006). *Me and my kitten*. New York: Tangerine Press.

Foster, K. (2006). *The dogs who found me*. Guilford, CT: Lyons Press.

George, J.C. (2000). *How to talk to your dog*. Ill. S. Truesdell. New York: HarperCollins.

Gibbons, G. (2000). *Rabbits, rabbits, and more rabbits*. New York, NY: Holiday House.

Goldblatt, S. (2007). *Stray*. New York: Delacorte.

Goldfinger, J. P. (2007). *My dog Lyle*. Ill. by Jennifer P. Goldfinger. New York: Clarion.

- Goldhammer, C. (2006). *Still life with chickens*. New York: Hudson Street Press.
- Goldman Koss, A. (1998). *The trouble with Zinny Weston*. New York: Penguin Group (USA) Incorporated.
- Goodney Lea, S. (2007). *Delinquency and animal cruelty : myths and realities about social pathology*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing.
- Graham, B. (2001). *"Let's get a pup!" said Kate*. Cambridge, Mass: Candlewick Press
- Graham, M (1967). *Be nice to spiders*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Grogan, J. (2005). *Marley and me: Life and love with the world's worst dog*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Grogan, J. (2007). *Bad dog, Marley*. Ill. by Richard Cowdrey. New York: HarperCollins.
- Grogan, J. (2007). *Marley: A dog like no other*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Haddon, M. (2004). *The curious incident of the dog in the night-time*. New York: Random House.
- Hall, L. (1986). *Danger dog*. New York: Atheneum.
- Hatkoff, I. (2006). *Owen and Mzee: The true story of a remarkable friendship*. New York: Scholastic Press.
- Heiligman, D. (2005). *Fun dog, sun dog*. Ill. by Tim Bowers. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish.
- Herriot, J. (1999). *All creatures great and small*. New York: MJF Books.
- Hiassen, C. (2003). *Hoot*. Waterville, ME: Thorndike Press.
- Hoose P. and Hoose H. (1998). *Hey, little ant*. Ill. By Debbie Tilley. Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press.
- Horn, P. (2003). *The best father of all*. Illus. C. Kadmon. New York: North-South Books.
- Jennings, R. W. (2004). *Scribble*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin
- Kasza, K. (2005). *The dog who cried wolf*. New York: Scholastic.
- Kawczynska, C. & Woo, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Dog is my co-pilot: Great writers on the world's oldest friendship*. New York.
- Kehret, P. (1999). *Shelter dogs: Amazing stories of adopted strays*. Morton Grove, Illinois: Albert Whitman and Company.
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- Koja, K. (2004). *Stray dog*. New York: Puffin.
- Koontz, D. (2004). *Life is good: Lessons in joyful living*. New York: Yorkville Press.
- Les, S. & Lee, T. (2005). *Please, puppy, please*. Illus. K. Nelson. New York: Scholastic.
- Lewis, K. (2006). *A Puppy for Annie*. Massachusetts: Candlewick Press.
- MacLachlan, P. and Charest, E.M. (2006). *Once I ate a pie*. Ill. by Katy Schneider. New York: HaperCollins Children's Books.
- Marion, J. (1992). *Hello, crow*. Illus. L. Bowman. New York: Barton.
- Martin, A. (2007). *A dog's life: Autobiography of a stray*. New York: Scholastic.
- McCloskey, R. (1941). *Make way for ducklings*. New York: Viking.
- Nickle, J. (2006). *The ant bully*. New York: Scholastic.
- Noyes, D. (2006). *One kingdom: Our lives with animals*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- O'Connor, J. and Hartland, J. (2003). *The best pet for me!* Ill: by Jessie Harland. New York: Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers.
- O'Connor, J. (2007). *Fancy Nancy and the posh puppy*. Ill. by Robin Preiss Glasser. New York: Harper Collins.
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- Palmer, H.M. (1961). *A fish out of water*. New York: Beginner Books.
- Paulsen, G. (2003). *Brian's hunt*. New York: Random House Children's Books.
- Paulsen, G (1998). *My Life in Dog Years*. New York: Random House Children's Books.
- Pinkwater, J. & Pinkwater, D. (2004). *Superpuppy: How to choose, raise and train the best possible dog for you*. New York: Clarion Books.
- Rathmann, P., (1995). *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. Ill. By Peggy Rathmann. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Rinard, J. A. (1985). *Helping our animal friends*. Washington, D.C.: The National Geographic Society.
- Roca, N. & Curto, R. (2006). *Let's take care of our new dog*. New York: Gemser Publications, S.L.
- Roth, M. (2002). *The man who talks to dogs: The story of America's wild street dogs and their unlikely savior*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rylant, C. (2006). *Boris*. New York: Harcourt.
- Scholastic. (2007). *The cat artist collection: Cats: Why do cats purr? And other true facts*. New York: Scholastic.
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- Simont, M. (2001). *The stray dog*. New York: Scholastic.
- Sucher, J. J. (2000). *Shetland Sheepdogs*. New York: Barron's Educational Series.
- Tolan, S. (2006). *Listen!* New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Trapani, I. (2004). *How much is that doggie in the window?*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.
- Wallace, Bob. (2002). *A Dog Called Kitty*. New York: Aladdin.
- Wells, R. (1997). *McDuff moves in*. Ill. By Susan Jeffers. New York: Hyperion Books For Children.
- Wilber, H. L. (2007). *M is for meow*. Ill. by Robert Papp. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press.
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