



“Happily Ever After” Plays

Subject: General Care/Animal Cruelty

Grade Levels: 2nd-5th Grade

Time: 5 days, 30-45 minutes per day

Audience Size: At least four; most easily done with less than 20

**** Instructions are for a group of 16 children divided into four groups of four. Lesson can easily be adapted to larger or smaller groups. ****

Objectives:

- Students will work together to write, practice, and perform a short play.
- When given a scenario where a person is treating an animal poorly, students will brainstorm possible solutions.
- Students will understand how their own actions can change the behavior or happiness of an animal.
- Students will articulate a humane theme after watching a short play.

Materials:

- Sample skit (See “Print Outs” document)
- One each of the double-sided “Planning Your Play” sheets, one for each group. (See “Print Outs” document)
- Stage or clear area for acting
- Props for the plays. Suggested items include:
 - “Fishing pole” cat toy
 - Cat and dog ears for costumes
 - Lightweight chain
 - Toy badge
 - Food wrappers
 - Trash can
 - Shoe
 - Chew toy

Procedure:

Day 1 – Introduction – About 45 Minutes

1. Discuss “What is a play?”
 - a. Cover basic elements such as characters, dialogue, setting, and theme.

- b. Pay special attention to Beginning, Middle, and End. In the beginning, our plays will show a problem that needs to be solved. In the middle, the characters will learn how to solve the problem. And in the end, there is a happy ending.
2. Show the class an example play. Ideally, this will be a short, over-acted skit performed by two educators. It can also be done with one educator and a volunteer from the audience reading from the script. (See attachment for a sample skit.)
3. Call on two or three students to summarize what they saw. Ask students to point out some of the basic elements in the play.
 - a. Theme: Train dogs with kindness instead of cruelty; it's more humane and it works better.
 - b. Characters: Alex and Taylor. Students may also include Rex and Daisy.
 - c. Dialogue: Alex and Taylor's conversation.
 - d. Setting: Outside of Alex's house.
4. On a board, write "Beginning," "Middle," and "End." As a class, decide what the beginning, middle, and end of the skit was, write these ideas on the board.
 - a. Beginning: Alex tells Taylor to yell at and kick Rex for jumping up.
 - b. Middle: Taylor teaches Alex that Rex can be trained with kindness to sit instead of jumping.
 - c. End: Alex completes the training and reports that Rex's behavior has improved. Alex no longer yells at or kicks Rex.
5. Explain: "Now that you have seen an example of a play, I want you to create your own. Over the next five sessions, we will be working on plays that teach an important lesson about animals. We will write and practice our plays the first four classes. On the fifth day, we will perform for each other! I will divide you into groups of four and each of you will play a character in your plays. Some of you can play animals (like Rex); some of you can play people (like Alex or Taylor). You will need at least one person who is doing something wrong (like Alex) and one person to teach him or her a better way (like Taylor). I am going to hand you a sheet of paper that will help you plan your play. The paper will already have a beginning written down. In your groups, you need to create a middle and an end. Remember, in the beginning, there is a problem and the animals are not being treated humanely. During the middle, your characters learn a better way. Then, in the end, your play will show us a happy ending. On the back of this sheet, you need to fill in the theme, list who will play which characters, and write down a setting for your play. Today, I want you to fill out each section of this sheet. Tomorrow, we can work on dialogue. I will be around to help you as you work."
6. Divide class into four groups with four students each (you can change the number and size of groups to fit your class size). Give each group a different "Planning Your Play" sheet and let them begin planning.
7. Walk around to each group as they are working to help them with planning. Some groups will dive right in while others will need more guidance.

Here are some sample ideas for the plays. Your students may be creative and come up with other workable ideas, though. Use these ideas to help steer them in the right direction if they need help.

- a. "Teasing Cat"
 - i. Middle: A parent notices children teasing cat. He or she explains that the rough teasing scares the cat and shows children how to play with a cat toy.
 - ii. End: Children and cat become friends.
 - iii. Theme: Teasing animals isn't fun. If we play kindly, the animal will have fun and we won't get hurt.
 - iv. Setting: Family's home
 - v. Characters: One cat, two children, one parent
- b. "Chain Dog"
 - i. Middle: An animal control officer tells the dog's guardians that leaving the dog outside on a chain all day is not healthy for the dog. Asks them to bring the dog inside.
 - ii. End: The dog's guardians change their ways and let the dog inside. They love the dog and the dog is not lonely anymore.
 - iii. Theme: Dogs want to be part of the family, don't leave them outside all the time.
 - iv. Setting: Family's home
 - v. Characters: One dog, two guardians, one animal control officer
- c. "Rude Picnic"
 - i. Middle: A park ranger stops a family and explains that the trash can be eaten by wild animals and that chasing squirrels is cruel. If everyone acted the same way, the park would no longer be beautiful.
 - ii. End: The family cleans up their act, puts all their trash in a trash can, and watches the squirrels bury nuts at a safe distance.
 - iii. Theme: We have to respect nature and work hard to keep it safe for wild animals.
 - iv. Setting: National Park
 - v. Characters: One squirrel, one park ranger, two family members
- d. "Chewed Shoe"
 - i. Middle: Family is sad that their dog is scared of them. They call a dog trainer for help. The dog trainer says that the yelling has made the dog afraid. Instead of yelling, they can put away their shoes, give the dog something safe to chew on, and crate the dog while the family is gone.
 - ii. End: The dog is not afraid anymore and the family's shoes are not being chewed up.
 - iii. Theme: Yelling never helps train a dog. Find friendlier ways to train your dog so everyone can be happy.
 - iv. Setting: Family's home

v. Characters: One dog, two guardians, one dog trainer

8. After the groups have had time to finish their sheets, collect the papers and keep for Day 2.

Day 2 – Dialogue – About 30 Minutes

1. Review elements of a play with your class: beginning, middle, end, characters, dialogue, setting, and theme. At this point your groups should have everything but the dialogue roughly sketched out.
2. Explain: “Today, I need you to do three things with your plays. First, you need to decide who will play each character. Second, you need to write the dialogue for each character. Third, you should practice your dialogue in your group. When you are writing the dialogue, remember to plan out everything your group members are going to say in the play. Please choose one member of the group to be a recorder. The recorder should write down your dialogue on a separate sheet of paper. I’m going to pass back your “Planning Your Play” sheets so that you can read over what you wrote down on day one. Make sure you write dialogue for the beginning, middle, and end of your play. The animals in your plays can have lines, too. Cats can meow or hiss, dogs can bark or whine, and squirrels can chatter. After you write some dialogue, take a moment to practice reading your part aloud. You can do this in your seats. If something sounds weird when you say it aloud, you might want to write it differently. After you write all your dialogue, practice it as a group two times.”
3. To keep your students focused, write the three tasks on a board:
 - a. Assign characters
 - b. Write dialogue
 - c. Practice dialogue at least twice
4. Arrange students into their groups and pass back their “Planning Your Play” sheets. Allow them to work while you walk around to offer help.
5. If one group finished early, they can continue practicing while the other groups finish.
6. Collect all papers and keep for Day 3.

Day 3 – Rehearsal – About 30 Minutes

1. Today your groups will start practicing their plays. Explain: “Today, we are going to start rehearsing our plays. That means you are going to be up from your tables, moving around while saying your lines. I am going to assign each group an area of the room to work in. That will be your stage and you must keep your plays confined to that area. I will be passing back your papers, and I will also pass out some props for you to use. Some of you will get costume items like animal ears. Some of your plays have objects in them that you will need when you perform. Let me know if you have any questions about how to use these props. I can help you.”

2. Assign each group a section of the room to be their “stage.” Put the students in groups in their “stages.” Pass out their “Planning Your Play” sheets, dialogue papers, and any props you would like them to use in their play (refer to materials list for suggested props).
3. Allow groups to practice their plays. Continue going around to each group to help. Halfway through the allotted time, ask to see the play when you visit a group. You may need to give the group suggestions to make it better. Always give the group at least one compliment before each suggestion on how to make the play better.
4. Collect all papers and props to save for tomorrow

Day 4 – Feedback – About 45 Minutes

Note: younger students may not be able to give each other helpful critiques. If you think it would be unproductive to include this portion of the lesson with your group, just use Day 4 as an extra practice day.

1. Today is all about practice. The groups will work independently for the first half. Then, they will take turns watching a neighbor’s group perform and give helpful suggestions. After they have suggestions to work on, the groups should practice for a few more minutes. Explain: “Today we are going to give our neighbors help with their plays. That means you will watch another group’s play, and then each of you will tell the group two things. First, tell them something about the play that you liked. Next, tell them something you would change. Remember, you *cannot* tell them to change something until you have told them something you liked. Everyone has worked very hard on their plays, so it is important to be polite to each other. We don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. Here is how we will practice today: First, I want you to practice in your groups for 10 minutes. Then, I will pair your group with a neighbor group. You will take turns watching each other’s plays and giving advice. After you have some advice to work with, we will spend another 15 minutes practicing. Try to make your play as good as it can be.”
2. Move students to their “stage” area and pass out papers and props.
3. Observe them as they practice for 10 minutes.
4. Pair up the groups. For example, pair up “Chewed Shoe” with “Rude Picnic” so that the group members can watch and critique each other’s plays. Choose which group will go first and which group will go second for each pair. Carefully monitor the groups to make sure they are offering praise as well as advice. A recorder for each group should write down the comments as they are received.
5. After the groups have each performed and watched a performance and given and received advice, allow them to practice for another 15 minutes.
6. Collect all materials for tomorrow.

Day 5 – Performance – About 40 Minutes

Your audience is up to you. You may have groups perform just for their classmates or you could invite parents and friends.

1. Clear an area in the front of your classroom to act as the stage. Arrange the chairs in rows for the audience.
2. Pass out papers and props to each group.
3. Determine the order or appearance either through drawing numbers or volunteering.
4. For the audience's benefit, you may want to introduce each play group and give a dramatic summary before they begin.
5. After each group's performance, review the theme of the play with the audience.
6. End the session with some discussion questions for the class that will summarize the week:
 - a. In some of our plays, the animals did things that upset the humans. A cat scratched children and a dog chewed a shoe. Why did the animals do these things? How did the people change what they were doing to help the animals?
 - b. When people keep their dogs outside, how much time do you think they spend with their dogs every day? When people keep their dogs inside, how much time do you think they spend with their dogs every day? How do you think the chained dog felt when he/she was left outside?
 - c. Why do you think a dog might chew things when he or she is left alone? Dog trainers tell us that it won't help to yell at our dog when we come home and find the mess, why do you think that is?
 - d. If you tease an animal instead of playing nicely, what could happen? How do you think an animal would feel after being teased? How might you feel after teasing an animal?
 - e. What types of homes do wild animals live in? What can we do to protect their homes? Do you think wild animals want to play with people? What should you do when you see a wild animal?