

FABULOUS FELINES
LESSON 2: Grades K-3
HOW TO SPEAK “CAT”

Show-Me Standards: Academic Goals: 1.5, 1.10, 2.3, 4.6, 4.7;
Knowledge Goals: Communication Arts – 1, 4, 6; Science – 3; Health/Physical Education -5

Objective: To interpret feline verbal and non-verbal communication and to understand warning signs to avoid cat scratches/bites.

Materials:

- “What is This Cat Telling You?” handout
- “Answer Sheet” handout
- Pencils
- Paper or poster board
- Crayons, colored pencils, markers
- “Be Kind to All Pets” color sheet

Method: Today we’re going to learn how cats talk to us. Learning what cats are “saying” is important. It can help us understand how they are feeling. It can also help us predict their behavior. Your cat is talking all the time. Are you ready to learn this fascinating language?

Ask the children how they let others know what they are thinking or feeling. Usual responses include talking, writing, and sign language. Believe it or not, animals and people have very similar ways of expressing their thoughts and feelings.

Speaking

Can cats speak the way we do using words? No! But they can speak using sounds. Most cats can make at least 16 different sounds! What are some sounds cats make? Ask students to practice a meow, purr, growl, and hiss. What is the meaning of each of these sounds? A purr usually means “I’m happy and relaxed.” A cat can use several different meows to make commands (“Feed me!”), make a request (“Please pet me.”), and make a complaint (“I accidentally got locked in the closet – I don’t like it in here!”). Cats use the growl and the hiss as warning signals to tell cats and people to stay away or back off. If a cat growls or hisses at you, leave the cat alone or a bite or scratch may follow.

Body talk

Cats also use their bodies to express themselves. People talk with their bodies, too. For example, if I shrug my shoulders, what does that mean? It usually means, “I don’t know.” Choose a few volunteers to act out different emotions using only their bodies. Show how we look when we are happy, mad, sad, and surprised. Ask the rest of the class to guess what emotion the actor is expressing.

Felines use their ears, tails, eyes, and body posture (the way they stand, sit, or lay) to “talk.” Most of the time they use their bodies and sounds together to tell you something.

Distribute the “What is This Cat Telling You?” handout to each student. As a class, look at each cat. Examine and discuss what is happening in each picture. Think about:

1. The cat’s body language – look at each part of the body and what it’s doing.
2. What sound the cat might make.
3. What the cat is feeling.
4. If the cat is safe to approach, touch, and/or pet. Why or why not?

Next, write a simple sentence under each picture to describe each cat. After completing the handout, look at the “Answer Sheet.” Are you fluent in “cat?” The more you understand something, the more you appreciate it. Cats are wonderful creatures when you get to know them. Take a few minutes every day to talk to your cat!

A few more tips to stay safe with cats

Do you have a cat at home or regularly visit with a neighbor’s, friend’s, or relative’s cat? If you spend time with cats, you should know that there are some things that may upset cats and cause them to bite or scratch. Remember, how you act determines a cat’s reaction.

*Make your cat a part of the family. A cat who receives little attention from people is more likely to bite or scratch. So spend some time with your cat each day playing gently or relaxing together.

*Leave your cat alone when she is eating or using the litterbox.

*If your cat has babies, be careful. Mother cats protect their young.

*Leave your cat alone when he is sleeping. Pets need some alone time each day. Put a special bed in a quiet corner of the house. Remember, cats sleep an average of 16 hours a day.

*Ask mom or dad to keep kitty healthy. Take your cat to the veterinarian every year for a check-up and shots. If a cat is sick or in pain, he may bite or scratch.

*Always ask the owner’s permission before petting a cat or dog.

*Most importantly, treat your cat and all animals with kindness and respect. Never pull a pet’s hair, tail, or ears. Don’t bite, kick, or hit a pet. Don’t chase, tease, or play rough games with pets.

Let’s practice treating pets gently. Using stuffed animals, demonstrate to students how to pet and touch animals. Remind them that our pets at home aren’t like stuffed animals at all. They have feelings and will hurt just like we would if we were kicked, hit, or tugged on. Allow students time to practice stroking and touching the stuffed animals. This is a good time to talk to them about using quiet, inside voices when around pets. Explain that pets may become upset or frightened if the children yell and scream around them.

Distribute the “Be Kind to All Pets” color sheet to reinforce this lesson.

Call to Action: Divide students into groups. Copy and cut the four individual pictures of cats from the “What is This Cat Telling You?” handout. Use a clean copy that does not have answers provided. Make enough copies so that each group has a set of these four “cat flash cards.” Allow each group some time to use the flash cards to quiz each other on cat language.

Have each student draw a poster of one tip for staying safe with cats. Display for other students to see.

Ask each student to tell one friend or family member what he or she has learned about cat communication and safety.

Related Reading:

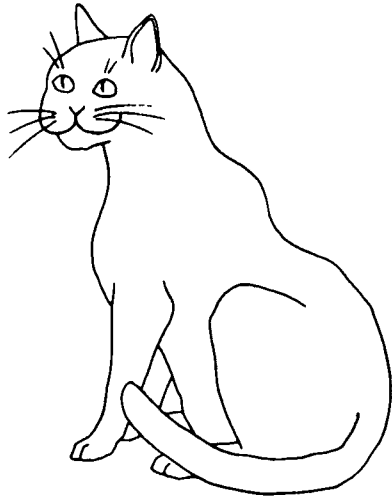
How to Talk to Your Cat, Jean Craighead George, 2000 Harpercollins Juvenile Books

Find out what your cat is really saying – and talk back! Learn through words and photos how to communicate with that ever-lovable animal – the cat. Ages 7 and up.

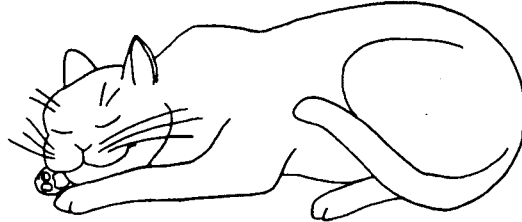
Web sites: For recommended animal-related web sites visit www.apamo.org and choose “Animal Issues” from the left-side menu, then choose “Links” from the top of the page. Or [click here](#) to launch your browser and link directly to the list.

What is This Cat Telling You?

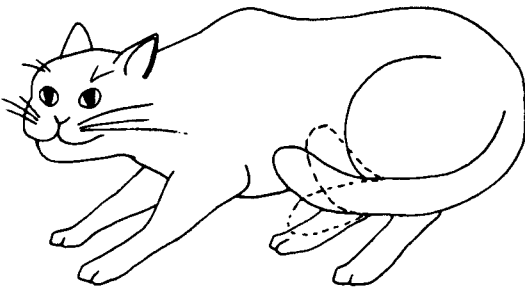
1



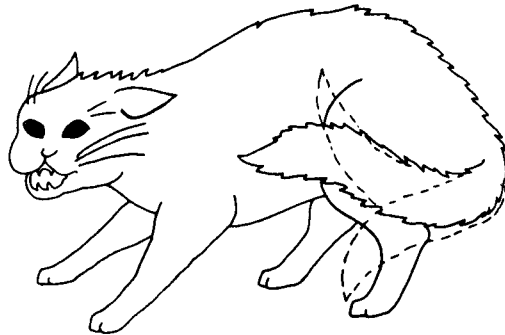
2



3

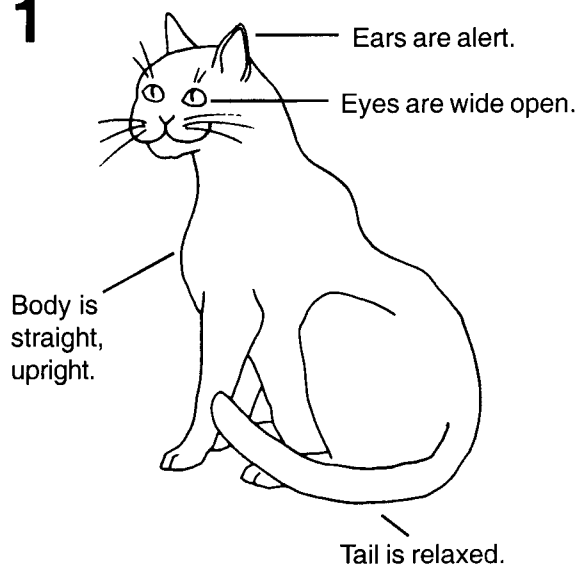


4



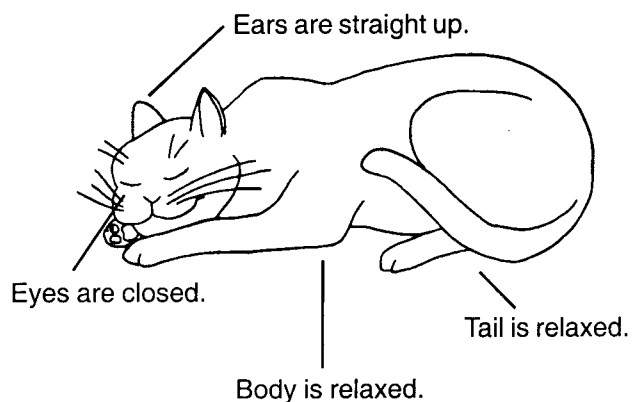
Answer Sheet

1



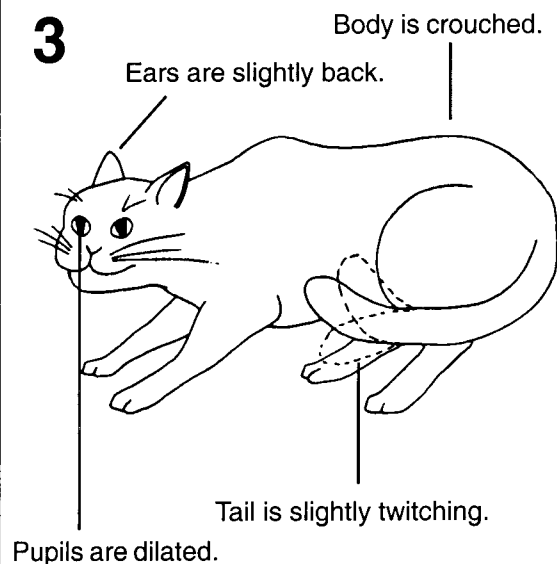
This cat is happy. "I trust you and am ready for attention." A safe cat to pet.

2



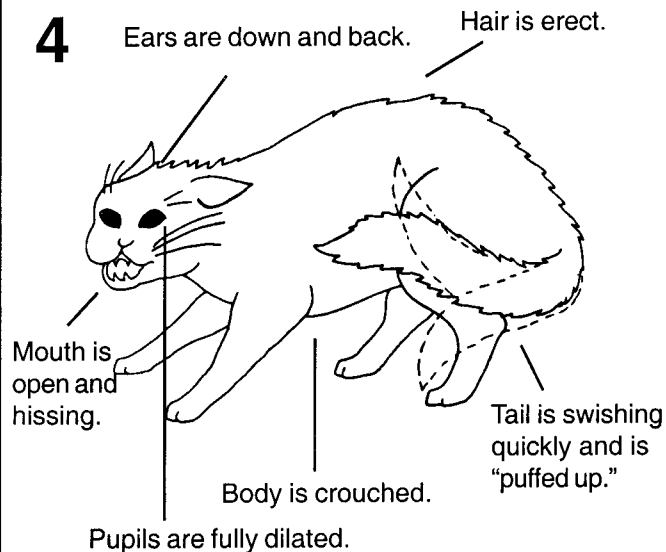
This cat feels safe and happy. Cats must trust you before sleeping in your presence. Don't surprise a sleeping cat.

3



This cat is playful. "Let's have some fun!" He is ready to pounce, so approach with some caution.

4



This cat is ready to defend himself! "Don't touch me or I may bite or scratch!" Leave this cat alone.



Be kind to all pets.