**Animals are Characters, Too: Characters who Gallop, Bark, and Squeak**

**This eight-week unit invites students to compare how animals, especially horses, dogs, and mice, are portrayed in fiction and nonfiction texts.**

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**Overview**

* + Students examine character development in depth by focusing on how animals and their traits are personified in literature and film. The teacher may choose to have students read varied texts about the same animals to facilitate a whole-group discussion, or to encourage students to read in small groups about different animals and compare and contrast what they learn about animal character development. Students choose an animal to research, comparing the research with humanly portrayed animals in literature. After reading selections from *Scranimals* by Jack Prelutsky or from *The Book of Nonsense* by Edward Lear, students also try their hand at writing a poem or limerick about an unusual animal. Students also begin writing their own narratives that incorporate the techniques and vocabulary studied with animal characters. If time permits, students may have the opportunity to compare how film and print versions of texts are similar and different from each other. This unit ends with a class discussion and essay response to the essential question.
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**Focus Standards**

* + These Focus Standards have been selected for the unit from the Common Core State Standards.
    - **RL.4.5:**Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text.
    - **RI.4.2:**Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.
    - **RF.4.4:**Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
    - **RF.4.4(c):**Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.
    - **W.4.1:**Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
    - **SL.4.5:**Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.
    - **L.4.5:**Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
    - **L.4.5(b):**Define words by category and by one or more key attributes (e.g., a *duck* is a bird that swims; a *tiger* is a large cat with stripes).
    - **L.4.5(c):**Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., note places at home that are *cozy*).

[Common Core State Standards, ELA](http://commoncore.org/free/resources/CCSSI_ELA_Standards.pdf) (1.5 MB)

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**Suggested Student Objectives**

* + - Read and discuss a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts about animals including horses, dogs, and mice.
    - Discuss and interpret poetic techniques and forms, such as rhyme scheme and limericks.
    - Find similarities and differences in animal characters and how they are personified.
    - Write a variety of responses to stories and poetry.
    - Read informational texts about animals, and create a Venn diagram comparing factual information with fictional portrayals.
    - Collaborate with classmates in order to publish their own animal story.
    - Compare print and film versions of animal stories, such as *The Black Stallion* (Walter Farley)*.*
    - Explain major differences between poetry, drama, and prose.
    - Recite poetry for classmates.
    - Participate in group discussions about the facts and fiction of animal characters.
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**Suggested Works**

* + (E) indicates a CCSS exemplar text; (EA) indicates a text from a writer with other works identified as exemplars.

**Literary Texts**

**Stories**

General

* + - *James Herriot's Treasury for Children: Warm and Joyful Tales by the Author of All Creatures Great and Small* (James Herriot)
    - *It's Raining Cats And Dogs: Making Sense of Animal Phrase* (Jackie Franza and Steve Gray)
    - *Every Living Thing* (Cynthia Rylant and S.D. Schindler)
    - *Nacho And Lolita* (Pam Munoz Ryan and Claudia Rueda)
    - *The Mayor of Central Park* (Avi and Brian Floca)
    - *Tacky the Penguin* (Helen Lester and Lynn Munsinger) (easier)

Horses

* + - *The Black Stallion* (Walter Farley) (E)
    - *Black Beauty: The Greatest Horse Story Ever Told* (DK Readers Level 4) (Anna Sewell and Victor Ambrus)
    - *Paint The Wind* (Pam Munoz Ryan)
    - *San Domingo: The Medicine Hat Stallion* (Marguerite Henry and Robert Lougbeed)
    - *Gift Horse: A Lakota Story* (S.D. Nelson)
    - *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses* (Paul Goble)
    - *Misty of Chincoteague* (Marguerite Henry and Wesley Dennis) (advanced)

Dogs

* + - *Because of Winn-Dixie* (Kate DiCamillo)
    - *Shelter Dogs: Amazing Stories of Adopted Strays* (Peg Kehret and Greg Farrar)
    - *Lewis and Clark and Me: A Dog's Tale* (Laurie Myers and Michael Dooling)
    - *The Trouble with Tuck: The Inspiring Story of a Dog Who Triumphs Against All Odds* (Theodore Taylor)
    - *Three Names* (Patricia Maclachlan and Alexander Pertzoff)
    - *A Dog's Life: Autobiography of a Stray* (Ann M. Martin)
    - *Marley: A Dog Like No Other, A Special Adaptation for Young Readers* (John Grogan)
    - *Lassie Come-Home: Eric Knight's Original 1938 Classic*(Rosemary Wells and Susan Jeffers)
    - *Shiloh*(Phyllis Reynolds Naylor and Barry Moser) (advanced)

Mice

* + - *Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread* (Kate DiCamillo and Timothy Basil Ering)
    - *Ben and Me: An Astonishing Life of Benjamin Franklin by His Good Mouse Amos* (Robert Lawson*)*
    - *Ralph S. Mouse* (Beverly Cleary and Tracy Dockray)
    - *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (Beverly Cleary)
    - *The Bookstore Mouse* (Peggy Christian and Gary A. Lippincott)
    - *Ragweed* (The Poppy Stories)(Avi and Brian Floca)
    - *The Race Across America* (Geronimo Stilton)
    - *The Story of Jumping Mouse: A Native American Legend* (John Steptoe)
    - *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (Robert C. O’Brien) (advanced)
    - *Poppy* (The Poppy Stories) (Avi and Brian Floca) (advanced)

**Poems**

* + - “A Bird Came Down the Walk” (Emily Dickinson) (E)
    - “The Rhinoceros“ (Ogden Nash)
    - “The Erratic Rat“ (Traditional limerick)
    - *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear* (Edward Lear)
    - *Scranimals* (Jack Prelutsky)
    - *The Beauty of the Beast: Poems from the Animal Kingdom* (Jack Prelutsky)
    - *Poetry for Young People: Animal Poems* (John Hollander and Simona Mulazzani)

**Informational Texts**

**Informational Text**

General

* + - “Seeing Eye to Eye” (*National Geographic Explorier!*) (Leslie Hall) (E)
    - “Good Pet, Bad Pet” (*Ranger Rick*, June 2002) (Elizabeth Schleichert) (E)
    - *National Geographic Encyclopedia of Animals*(George McKay)

Veterinarians

* + - *I Want to Be a Veterinarian*(Stephanie Maze)
    - *Veterinarian* (Cool Careers) (William Thomas)

Horses

* + - *Horses*(Seymour Simon) (E)
    - *H is for Horse: An Equestrian Alphabet*(Michael Ulmer and Gijsbert van Frankenhuyzen)
    - *Your Pet Pony* (Scholastic, A True Book) (Elaine Landau)
    - *Horse Heroes: True Stories Of Amazing Horses* (DK Readers Proficient Readers, Level 4) (Kate Petty)
    - *Panda: A Guide Horse For Ann*(Rosanna Hansen and Neil Soderstrom)
    - *The Kids' Horse Book*(Sylvia Funston)

Dogs

* + - *Dogs* (Smithsonian) (Seymour Simon) (EA)
    - *W is for Woof: A Dog Alphabet*(Ruth Strother and Gijsbert van Frankenhuyzen)
    - *Everything Dog: What Kids Really Want to Know About Dogs* (Kids' FAQs) (Marty Crisp)
    - *A Dog's Gotta Do What a Dog's Gotta Do: Dogs at Work*(Marilyn Singer)
    - *Your Pet Dog* (Scholastic, A True Book) (Elaine Landau)
    - *Why Are Dogs' Noses Wet?: And Other True Facts*(Howie Dewin)

Mice

* + - *Outside and Inside Rats and Mice*(Sandra Markle)
    - *The Mouse*(Animal Life Stories) (Angela Royston and Maurice Pledger)

**Art, Music, and Media**

**Media**

* + - *Black Stallion*(1979)
    - *Black Beauty*(1994)
    - *Black Beauty*(1946)
    - *Because of Winn Dixie*(2005)
    - *Tale of Despereaux*(2008)
    - *Babe* (1995)
    - *Ratatouille* (2007)
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**Sample Activities and Assessments**

* + **Poetry/Literature Response**

Read selections from *The Book of Nonsense* by Edward Lear aloud with a partner. Not only should you discuss what the poems mean, but also talk about how the poetic devices, structures, and vocabulary used are similar and different. As a class, we will define a “[limerick](http://volweb.utk.edu/school/bedford/harrisms/limerick.htm)” and its elements, and then talk about how Lear’s poems exemplify these characteristics. We will continue the T-chart started in the first unit (name of the technique and examples). At a later time, you will read selections from *Scranimals* by Jack Prelutsky aloud with the same partner. Partners will again find examples of poetic techniques and mark them with a Post-It note. Last, but not least, you will work with a partner to write your own animal limerick of a single animal (i.e., a lion) or an imaginary animal (i.e., such as the broccoli + lion = broccolion) (RL.4.4, RL.4.5, W.4.4, L.4.5a, L.4.5c)

**Literary Graphic Organizer**

As a class, we will keep a chart with the categories listed below of the animal stories and poems we’ve read. As the chart is filled in, we will use the information to talk about what we learned from literature.

* + - Title and author
    - Type of narration (first-person, third-person)
    - Animal character(s)
    - Character traits
    - Examples of personification (i.e., thoughts, words, and actions)
    - Synonyms for the character
    - Antonyms for the character
    - Summary (using the “[Somebody-Wanted-But-So” strategy](http://wvde.state.wv.us/strategybank/Somebody-Wanted-But-So.html))

Write your response on a Post-It note, on a white board, or in your journal and share it with a partner before each section of the class chart is filled in. (RF.4.4c, RL.4.1, RL.4.2, RL.4.3, RL.4.4, RL.4.5, RL.4.6, L.4.5c)

**Class Discussion**

Let’s compare and contrast how animals are personified. How is this personification portrayed in literature? If animals *could* talk and act like humans, which of the actions are most similar to generalizations about the animal (i.e., the “sly” fox, the “lazy” pig, etc.). Look back for specific lines or paragraphs in order to find explicit details from the stories and poems read. (SL.4.1, RL.4.3)

**Literature Response**

Write a journal entry from an animal's perspective, being sure to give the animal human characteristics. Trade your journal entry with a partner to see if they can figure out your animal from your effort to “personify” it while still maintaining its unique animal characteristics. (W.4.9a, W.4.9b, W.4.4, RL.4.3)

**Informational Text Graphic Organizer**

As a class, we will keep a chart of information using the categories below we’ve learned about animals such as horses, dogs, mice, or other animals of interest. As the chart is filled in, we will use the information to talk about what we learned from nonfiction books.

* + - Name of animal
    - Habitat
    - Diet
    - Protection/body facts
    - Enemies
    - Life expectancy
    - Interesting facts

Write your response on a Post-It note, on a white board, or in your journal and share it with a partner before each section of the class chart is filled in. (RF.4.4c, RI.4.1, RI.4.2, RI.4.4, RI.4.5, RI.4.7, RI.4.9)

**Journal Response**

Following a class discussion of animals studied, write a journal response (or make a graphic representation such as a Venn diagram) that compares facts learned with how the animal is portrayed in literature. (W.4.2a, W.4.2b, W.4.2c, W.4.4, W.4.7, L.4.1a, L.4.1b, L.4.1c, L.4.1d, L.4.1g, L.4.2a, L.4.2b, L.4.2c)

**Report Writing/Presentation**

Choose an animal or two you would be interested in researching, and write your thoughts down on a Post-It note. Find a classmate who is interested in the same animal. Together, research an animal of choice following the same categories as the graphic organizer (listed above). You will each be given the choice of displaying the information learned creatively in sections on a file folder, or in a multimedia presentation (see below). Be prepared to share your presentation with a new classmate. (W.4.4, W.4.7, L.4.1a, L.4.1b, L.4.1c, L.4.1d, L.4.1g, L.4.2a, L.4.2b, L.4.2c)

**Narrative Writing**

As your class discusses animal stories and poems, begin outlining your own narrative about an original animal character by starting with filling in the categories listed in the graphic organizer above. Before you begin writing, re-examine the characters in stories and poems we’ve read in this unit, recalling character traits, examples of personification, and lists of synonyms and/or figurative language you want to use. Make sure to plan a sequence of events that makes sense and think about key details to include. You will have the opportunity to work with a partner to revise, edit, and improve your story so that it can be published on a class webpage for others to see. Once the story is written, you will be asked to add audio recordings and visual displays to enhance it. (W.4.1, W.4.4, W.4.5, W.4.6, W.4.8, SL.4.5, L.4.5a, L.4.5b, L.4.5c, L.4.1a, L.4.1b, L.4.1c, L.4.1d, L.4.1g, L.4.2a, L.4.2b, L.4.2c)

**Class Discussion/Create a Classbook**

As a class, read and discuss*It's Raining Cats And Dogs: Making Sense of Animal Phrases*by Jackie Franza and Steve Gray. Illustrate the literal and figurative meaning of an animal idiom. Compile these illustrations into a classbook to share with younger students, and try to incorporate phrases learned into your daily writing and speaking. An alternate classbook idea is to make an ABC book of animal characters in a style similar to *W is for Woof* by Ruth Strother and Gijsbert Van Frankenhuyzen. (RL.4.1, SL.4.1, L.4.5b)

**Class Discussion**

Compare the film and print versions of a book, such as *Black Beauty* or *Black Stallion.* You can also download and compare any animal film, such as *Babe*, to a filmscript version of the films, found [here](http://www.script-o-rama.com/filmtranscripts.shtml). (Your teacher needs to check and approve the parts of the script you want to use.) Decide what you want to compare before viewing (e.g., characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, and/or stage directions), and keep notes in your journal about similarities and differences as well as the major differences between drama and prose. (SL.4.1, RL.4.5)

**Dramatization**

After discussing thestructural elements (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) that are unique to drama versus prose, add one or more of these elements to a Reader’s Theater script of a fun animal story, such as [*Tacky the Penguin*](http://www.readinglady.com/index.php?module=documents&JAS_DocumentManager_op=downloadFile&JAS_File_id=151) (pdf) byHelen Lester and Lynn Munsinger.With at least two other classmates, add at least two scenes—one before the script begins and one after the script ends—to make it a one-act/three-scene play, and present it as a class. (RL.4.5, W.4.4)

**Dramatization/Fluency**

Choose one of the poems from this unit, such as “A Bird Came Down the Walk” by Emily Dickinson or “The Rhinoceros” by Ogden Nash, to read and discuss with a partner. Recite the poem for your classmates. (RF.4.4c, SL.4.5)

**Word Study**

As an individual and as a class, keep an index card file of new words learned in this unit. You may also have a nonsense word section where you make up words for animals (basedon *Scranimals*) using new prefixes and suffixes learned until this point in the year. Each index card should include the word, a definition, the word in a sentence, and, for the nonsense words, an illustration. Keeping the words on index cards will allow you to use and sort the words by meaning and spelling features. (Note: This will be an ongoing activity all year long.) (L4.4a, L4.4b)

**Class Discussion/Reflective Essay**

As a class, summarize what was learned in this unit as it relates to the essential question (“How is the portrayal of animals similar and different between fiction and nonfiction?”) Following the class discussion, write a response in your journal. Work with a partner to edit and strengthen your writing before sharing with your teacher. (W.4.9a, W.4.9b, W.4.4, W.4.5, L.4.1a, L.4.1b, L.4.1c, L.4.1d, L.4.1g, L.4.2a, L.4.2b, L.4.2c)

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**Additional Resources**

* + - [*On Stage: Theater Games and Activities for Kids*](http://www.amazon.com/Stage-Theater-Games-Activities-Kids/dp/1556523246)(Lisa Bany-Winters) (RL.4.5)  
      Note: This compilation of varied and interesting theater games will stimulate the imagination and get young thespians ready to perform on stage. The games are divided into different categories, including improvisation, creating characters, using and becoming objects, and ideas for pantomime and puppetry. There are also suggestions for monologues, scenes, and plays.
    - [Webcams in the Classroom: Animal Inquiry and Observation](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/webcams-classroom-animal-inquiry-234.html) (ReadWriteThink) (SL.4.1)  
      Note: Observe animal habits and habitats using one of the many webcams broadcasting from zoos and aquariums around the United States and the world in this inquiry-based activity that focuses on observation logs, class discussion, questioning, and research.
    - [*Black Beauty*author Anna Sewell was born in 1820](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/black-beauty-author-anna-20466.html) (ReadWriteThink) (W.4.7)  
      Note: In *Black Beauty,* Anna Sewell tackled one of the contemporary issues of her time, the cruel treatment of horses, many of them abused by their owners. Her work made readers aware of the need for laws to protect animals from harsh and abusive treatment.
    - [Animal Inquiry](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/animal-inquiry-30020.html) (ReadWriteThink) (W.4.7)  
      Note: The Animal Inquiry interactive is a versatile tool that can enhance student inquiry in research at the elementary level. The graphic organizer invites students to explore four facets of animals (basic facts, animal babies, interaction with others, and habitats) the possibilities for extensions or adaptations. Moreover, this makes a nice complement to inquiry-based projects.
    - [Celebrate Kate DiCamillo's birthday today](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/celebrate-kate-dicamillo-birthday-20678.html) (ReadWriteThink) (RL.4.3)  
      Note: DiCamillo often writes about animals, such as the title characters in *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*, *Because of Winn-Dixie*,*The Tale of Despereaux*, and *The Tiger Rising.* Have your students examine the characters in these stories, looking for character traits, examples of personification, and similarities and differences.
    - [Alaska Native Stories: Using Narrative to Introduce Expository Text](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/alaska-native-stories-using-129.html) (ReadWriteThink) (RI.4.9)  
      Note: This lesson uses traditional stories of the Native peoples (i.e., narrative text) to introduce students to the study of animals in Alaska (i.e., expository text).
    - [Multimedia Responses to Content Area Topics Using Fact-“Faction”-Fiction](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/multimedia-responses-content-area-119.html) (ReadWriteThink) (RL.4.9)  
      Note: Young learners are very inquisitive and eager to learn about the world around them. One enjoyable way to do so is by reading books that blend fact and fiction, often with humorous results. This lesson encourages students' natural curiosity about spiders and builds on their prior knowledge.
    - [*How the Fourth Grade and I Wrote a Play*](http://www.childdrama.com/trail1.html)(Matt Buchanan)(W.4.6)  
      Note: What follows is a description of the process by which drama students, classroom teachers, and drama teacher created a play that was both informative and entertaining for its audience and enriching and personal for its creators.
    - [Author of the Month: Jack Prelutsky](http://www.mhhe.com/socscience/education/kidlit/aom/july01_aom.htm) (McGraw-Hill, Child Lit)
    - [Writing with Writers: Poetry Writing with Jack Prelutsky](http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/jack_home.htm) (Scholastic)
    - [Limericks](http://www.oldfashionedamericanhumor.com/limericks.html) (Old-Fashioned-American-Humor.Com)
    - [Creative Drama Lesson Plans](http://www.childdrama.com/lessons.html) (Creative Drama Classroom)
    - [Reader’s Theater K-3 Scripts](http://www.grandviewlibrary.org/ReaderTheater.aspx) (Grandview Library, East Ramapo School District, NJ)
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**Terminology**

* + - character traits
    - first-person
    - limerick
    - narration
    - personification
    - (review of) poetic devices (continued): rhyme scheme, meter, simile, metaphor
    - third-person
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**Making Interdisciplinary Connections**

* + **This unit teaches:**
    - **History/geography:**
      * Importance of animals in Native American cultures (e.g., Lakota Indians)
      * Role of animals in historical events, such as exploration (e.g., Lewis and Clark)
    - **Science:** Animals (e.g., horses, mice, and dogs, etc.) and their traits (e.g., classification, habitat, diet, form(s) of protection, enemies, length of life, domesticated vs. wild, etc.); veterinarians

**This unit could be extended to teach:**

* + - **Science**: Senses of animals and people
      * Optics (e.g., examining ways that animals have adapted to interpret sensory information; etc.) Parts of the eye in people and animals: (e.g., optic nerve, cornea, lens, iris, pupil, retina, etc.) and the function of each part.
      * Ears of animals and people. Parts of the ear (e.g., outer ear, ear canal, ear drum, auditory nerve, etc) and the function of each part.
    - **Art:** [Horses in art](http://www.princetonol.com/groups/iad/Files/horses.htm) (The Incredible Art Department)
    - **Music:** How animals are portrayed in music (e.g., *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saëns, etc.)