

# Chain Reaction

*Dogs who are chained or tied up in back yards lead lonely miserable lives. Stories involve chains of events with decisions that lead to consequences, which in turn lead to more decisions. These activities explore both types of chains.*

## Curriculum Connection

### **Alberta Education Program of Studies: English Language Arts (2000)**

#### **1.1 Discover and Explore**

- Explore ideas and feelings by asking questions, talking to others and referring to oral, print and other media texts. (grade 3 )
- Compare new ideas, information and experiences to prior knowledge and experiences (grade 4)
- Share personal responses to explore and develop understanding of oral, print and other media texts (grade 4)
- Read, write, represent and talk to explore personal understanding of new ideas and information (grade 5)
- Engage in exploratory communication to share personal responses and develop own interpretations. (grade 6)

#### **2.1 Use Strategies and Cues**

- Combine personal experiences and the knowledge and skills gained through previous experiences with oral, print and other media texts to understand new ideas and information. (grade 6)

#### **3.3 Organize, Record and Explore**

- Combine personal experiences and the knowledge and skills gained through previous experiences with oral, print and other media texts to understand new ideas and information. (grade 5)

## Objectives

Students will:

- Identify attributes of a responsible pet owner
- Use problem solving and brainstorm different solutions to a problem

## Activities

### **1 Why get a dog?**

As a class, list the reasons a family would want a dog. These could include companionship, protection, etc.

Then brainstorm the things a dog needs from his family. Answers include the basic needs of life: food, water, shelter, care. Other needs include grooming (brushing fur to keep it from matting, trimming claws, etc.), exercise, relief from boredom, and companionship.

### **2 Chaining Dogs**

Read or have students read *Chained Dogs*. Then jot down all the reasons why chaining dogs can present problems.

Next read *Greetings With Love... From a Lonely Dog* by Edith Lassen Johnson. Discuss the poem with your students. Be sensitive to those students who may have dogs in that situation.

### **3 Donovan: The true story of a backyard dog**

Read, or have a students read *Donovan: The True Story of a Backyard Dog* by Lori Jo Oswald. Discuss the story with the class.

*Possible Discussion Questions*

- Why did the owners feel that Donovan was “well cared for”?



## Chain Reaction (continued)

- Do you think Donovan was well cared for? Why or why not?
- How would you feel if you were Donovan?
- Do you think Donovan's family are bad people, or do they simply not know what dogs need or how to train them?
- What are the needs of pets?

### 4 Chain Reaction

1. Write on the board: "Problem: dog keeps getting out of the yard." Ask the students to brainstorm possible solutions – e.g., add boards or chicken wire to bottom of fence (to deter digging); add extra fencing to the top; allow the dog to stay inside, etc. Have one possible solution "chain the dog."

2. Add another link to the chain of consequences. Divide the class into groups, one group for each possible solution suggested in the previous step. Ask them to suggest what possible outcomes might occur from their solution – both positive and negative. For instance, to the idea of keeping the dog inside, possible outcomes include "dog is happy and warm," "dog gets everything dirty," etc.

3. For the next link, have students identify the negative outcomes, and suggest solutions to each one.

4. Continue to add solutions and possible outcomes as time permits, coming up with as many ideas as possible. Make sure there is always at least one positive outcome (in some cases, the best outcome may be giving the dog up for adoption). *See the example to the right.*

5. Allow some time for discussion. What solutions are easiest? Which are most effective – i.e., which lead most quickly to a positive

outcome? Was it hard to come up with positive solutions from some outcomes? Were some positive outcomes more positive than others?

6. To conclude, have each student pick one chain of events starting from the original problem and following it to a positive outcome. Have them write a story about a fictional dog, giving the dog a name and including lots of details to make the story come alive. Their story should follow the chosen chain of events, including every solution and outcome in the chain.

7. At a later class, invite students to read their stories. Discuss the many problems that are encountered and creative ways to overcome them.

### Chain Reaction Examples

The following two examples may be similar to what your students might come up with. Note that the chains could go on longer, and several may lead to the same positive outcome.

#### Example 1:

*Family gets a dog → dog escapes from yard → **keep dog inside** → dog messes in house → spend time house training → dog chews shoes, books, etc. → keep dog in kitchen when no one home → spend time walking dog every day → enjoy life with your dog.*

#### Example 2:

*Family gets a dog → dog escapes from yard → **tie up dog** → dog gets tangled and injured → take dog to veterinarian for treatment of injuries → continue to keep dog tied up → dog barks constantly → neighbours complain → find a good home for the dog.*



# Chained Dogs

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The Alberta SPCA often gets calls from concerned members of the public who report seeing dogs chained or tied up in backyards. Often these dogs get very little interaction with their owners – who may feed them and give them water every day, but are rarely seen playing with them or giving any other kind of care.

Although keeping an animal tethered is not against the law, keeping a pet chained up alone for long periods poses several problems. First of all, leaving a dog alone deprives it of social interaction. Dogs are social animals; that's what makes them such desirable pets.

About 14,000 years ago, our ancestors domesticated wolves to help in the hunt and watch for predators. In turn, people provided companionship, food and shelter for them. These domestic wolves became the companion animals we now call dogs. Though no longer wild, dogs still have the instinctive need to live in packs, like wolves. A pet dog's pack is its human family and the other pets that live in the household.

There is some evidence that dogs left chained and alone for long periods are more likely to bite than other dogs. Dogs need to be socialized (accustomed to being around people and other dogs) so they won't be afraid. Being afraid is a common reason for dogs biting people.

Another point to note is that a tethered dog can get tangled to the point that it is either in pain or unable to reach shelter, food or water.

Either outcome could be disastrous. Too often we encounter dogs that are severely dehydrated even though there may be a source of water, just out of reach because of a tangled rope.

Unfortunately, dogs sometimes get injured or strangled, and if the dog breaks the rope and escapes, it could get snagged on a fence or other object – leading to a slow, painful death.

## Greetings with Love

### ... From a Lonely Dog

I wish someone would tell me what it is  
That I've done wrong.

Why do I have to stay chained up and be  
Left alone so long?

They seemed so glad to have me when  
I came here as a pup.

There were so many things we'd do  
While I was growing up.

The Master said he'd train me as a  
companion and a friend.

The Mistress said she'd never fear  
To be left alone again.

The children said they'd feed me and  
Brush me every day.

They'd play with me and walk me  
If I would only stay.

But now the Master "hasn't Time"  
The Mistress says I shed.

She doesn't want me in the house  
Not even to be fed.

The children never walk me  
They always say, "Not now".

I wish that I could please them –  
Won't someone tell me how?

All I had, you see, was love.

I wish they would explain

Why they said they wanted mine,  
And then left it on a chain.

— Edith Lassen Johnson



## Donovan: *The true story of a backyard dog*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**By Lori Jo Oswald** *First published in Dog Fancy Magazine (1982); printed by permission of the author.*

Donovan was not a unique dog. He did not pull a child from in front of an oncoming car. He did not bark during a house fire and save an entire family from death. He did not win a ribbon in an American Kennel Club dog show, or even in a community fun match. Indeed, Donovan was considered quite an “ordinary” dog.

Donovan’s owners could be considered quite “ordinary” too – a young family, two children, several cats. Fourteen years ago they decided to get a dog. A dog would be fun for the kids, Mr. and Mrs. felt. So one day, perhaps at a shopping centre giveaway, or maybe in the pet section of the local classified ads, they found Donovan and brought him home.

At first the kids were excited. They played with the little beagle mix in the backyard, throwing him sticks to chase and fighting over who got to feed him. As the summer wore on, though, the children began to fight over who had to feed Donovan.

Mr. built a small house for Donovan, staked it out back and attached his chain to it. Mr. and Mrs. agreed that Donovan would do “just fine” outside, and they wouldn’t have to worry about the dog hairs all over the house.

I never met Donovan. Though I’d once been to this house, I didn’t know he existed. The kids, I was told, couldn’t decide if the last time they walked him was last year or the year before. Donovan lived on a 6-foot chain. He dug holes for entertainment. He dug and dug in his tiny yard. A friend who saw him told me about the circular trench around Donovan’s dog house, as far as he could reach on his short chain.

Oh, but he was “well cared for.” Mrs. complained of the way some people treat their dogs. She “can’t understand” how some people could be so cruel. “We never starved Donovan,” she said proudly, and it’s true that he wasn’t entirely neglected – he was well-fed. And it’s also true that he was not completely ignored – when he barked, someone always yelled.

For 14 years Donovan lived out back on his chain. He ate his fill every night, but still he hungered – for attention and affection. One day he finally escaped his little world of chain and holes and doghouse: the day he died.

Donovan, unfortunately, is not a fictional character. Neither are his owners. They have been going to the local animal shelter lately and are talking about getting another dog. “We sure miss Donovan,” they lament.

