CAREERS WORKING WITH ANIMALS

by Willow Soltow

What do you want to be when you grow up? This is a question adults have probably been asking young people since civilization began. Of course, when we ask it, we seldom expect youngsters to know for sure what job they would like to pursue as adults. But we cannot begin too early to help them learn about the many career possibilities that will one day be available to them.

For many of us, employment provides more than income. Pursuing a specific career is often a means by which we take action on the issues that are meaningful to us. It can be the basis for an entire lifestyle.

Animals and animal-related problems have an impact on nearly every community. Many different community helpers are involved in animal care occupations. Educating students about the careers that help animals and that help to solve animal problems can be an important addition to almost any social studies curriculum.

As humane educators, we encourage students to be receptive to ideas and values that benefit animals. We help youngsters develop respect for all that lives. We can, through a unit on animal-related careers, also help young people to learn that the future may hold career opportunities for them that are directly related to these values and beliefs.

Although the careers that your students will investigate in this unit may not necessarily guarantee wealth, prestige, or fame, they offer personal rewards that are meaningful to the people who pursue them.

The World of Work

Begin your unit on animal-related careers and community services by having students identify some of the reasons people choose the work they do. Have students take a poll of at least five of their adult friends, neighbors, teachers, and relatives. Have them ask each person what kind of work he or she does, what makes him or her job rewarding, and how the job benefits others in the community.

After students have taken the poll, have them, as a class, compare and tabulate the answers they received. Then have them discuss: What are some of the rewards (e.g., income, prestige, fulfillment of a personal goal or commitment) to consider in choosing a career? Point out that different people have different needs. What one person may find fulfilling might not meet another’s needs. How does this benefit the community overall?

Animal-Related Careers

Next, have students identify some careers that involve animals. List these careers on the chalkboard. Many children think of animal-related careers as being limited to jobs at animal hospitals or zoos. Point out that many occupations involving animals can be found at other facilities in the community. Some of these facilities include humane societies, animal shelters, wildlife sanctuaries, nature centers, private kennels, and more. There are jobs in education, animal care, management, public relations, animal obedience or training, animal control, and many other fields relating to animals.

Encourage students to think of as many animal careers as possible and list each one. Then have students discuss: Which of the listed careers help animals? Which help people? Which do both?

Finally, challenge students to think of traditionally non-animal-oriented careers that may have a special focus on animals. For instance, a lawyer who prosecutes people who harm animals or who does litigation for an animal rights organization. Other examples include a clerical worker at a shelter or animal hospital, a classroom teacher who focuses on humane education, a writer or artist who tries to make people more aware of the plight of animals through his or her work.

If your class receives Kind News, you can use the articles in the March 1985 issue to provide background information for your students on various animal-related careers. Some of the careers covered in this issue of Kind News include: humane educator, animal caretaker, investigator, veterinarian, lawyer for animal welfare, wildlife rehabilitator, and volunteer worker for animals.

Although volunteering does not strictly constitute a career, you may want to remind students that volunteering, like...
pursuing a career, can be a meaningful and constructive lifetime pursuit—one that might benefit the individual worker as well as the community in which he or she lives. Volunteering can also have an added benefit in providing you with a well-informed career choice.

If your class does not receive *Kind News*, you can get it by writing to the local animal shelter, hospital, nature center, or zoo. (For further suggestions on getting the most out of a class visit to the local animal shelter, nature center, kennel, or zoo. [Kind News, Vol. 2, No. 6, 1984, p. 31].)

Although formal education is important, the activity, have groups share their findings regarding each career.

The following questions will help you to assist students that have trouble getting started: What are the job opportunities available in your career? Would you have irregular working hours? What kind of income would you have in this career? Could you work in this career full-time? What might be some of the nonfinancial benefits of this career? What kind of education would be required in order to qualify for it? Might this present difficulties for some people? Why? Does the job involve direct contact with animals? With people? Would the job continue to be challenging over the years? What qualifications for the job are important?

Students may be surprised to learn that some veterinarians treat large animals as well as small ones. These animal doctors often must visit their patients, rather than having their patients visit the doctors.

Would this career involve feeding animals? Cleaning their cages? Would a person who pursues this career risk being bitten by a frightened animal? How might it feel to save an injured animal or to return a wild animal to its habitat? Would you be able to euthanize sick or homeless animals if that was part of your job? Explain that while people in animal-related careers care deeply about animals, they often find themselves in jobs in which animal suffering is encountered on a routine basis. How might it affect someone in an animal-related career to be near suffering animals? Have students consider: If you identified too closely with an animal that was suffering, is it possible that you might do the animal more harm than good? Why? If so, would this mean that you abandon the idea of an animal-related career? Point out to students that there are plenty of careers involving inpatient, fund raising, clerical or administrative duties in which individuals can effectively help animals, yet still have daily, direct contact with them.

Animals and People Who Help Them After the class shares information on the positive and negative aspects of animal careers, students complete the following writing exercise to give them a broader basis for understanding the implications of working with animals. Write the animal descriptions on the chalkboard: a lost dog; a stray, homeless cat; an injured raccoon; a pet horse that is ill; a pet dog that has not been spayed; a captured frog brought to school in a jar. Have students match each animal description with the name of an animal career professional who could help it. For example, students might match a lost dog with a veterinarian, an injured raccoon with a veterinarian, or a captured frog with a humane educator who would see that the frog was returned to its natural habitat.

Next to the name of each animal, write the name of the animal career professional whom students select. After all of the matches have been listed, have the chalkboard, have each student choose one animal-career-person match and write about the animal job and the reward of helping animals compensate for this.