

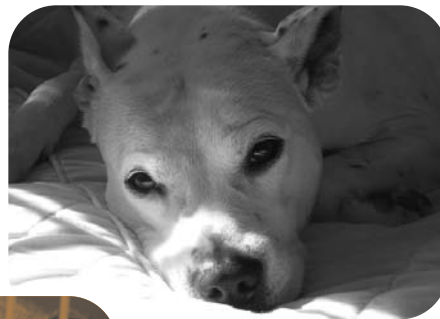


Animal Fighting

In the summer of 2007, people everywhere became blatantly aware of an underground world that animal welfare, animal rights and anti-cruelty groups know far too well—the world of dog fighting. When the 15-acre rural Virginia property owned by Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick was raided on drug-related suspicions, authorities discovered a large-scale dog fighting operation. The story hit the news like wildfire and the question resounded from Maine to California—“Dog fighting still goes on in the United States?”

Yes, dog fighting still occurs in the United States, and its history is deep. The development of modern day dog fighting as practiced in Europe, North and South America, can be traced to 1835, when bull-baiting was prohibited in England. After the ban, owners of bulldogs—who were used to bait bulls and other animals—turned to staging fights between the dogs. Soon, the largest bulldogs were bred with terriers to produce the bull terriers, who today are the prominent breed of choice for fighting. Staffordshire Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers and Pit Bull Terriers come from this ancestry. Dogs who fall into this broad class are identified as pit bulls.

The term “blood sport” has been around for hundreds of years, but its meaning has changed through the course of history. Originally used to describe hunting activities like fox hunting and hare coursing (the chase, capture and kill of hares by packs of sight hounds such as Greyhounds), the term eventually became more commonly used to describe any forced fight between two animals, or the baiting of one species by another. **Hog-dog fighting, bull-baiting, badger-baiting, trunking** and even **bullfighting** are all considered blood sports. Dog fighting is one of the most common blood sports in the United States today.



Man’s best friend isn’t the only animal fighting victim, however. Cockfighting (a fight between two game roosters) has its roots deep in American history and culture, with many of the founding fathers being fond of (and participating in) this blood sport, as well.

It wasn’t until June 2007 that cockfighting was made illegal in Louisiana, the last of the 50 states to ban the activity—though the ban did not take effect until August 2008. Though illegal throughout the United States today, cockfighting still occurs across the country, particularly in the rural South and in areas with immigrant populations in whose home countries cockfighting may still be legal and part of the norm.

Admittedly, the topic of animal fighting is a difficult one to address with students, but when approached appropriately, is a necessary and beneficial conversation—and they probably know more than you think. According to Jeff Eyre, Director of Field Operations for the ASPCA’s Anti-Cruelty Department, the youngest person documented and arrested for organized dog fighting was a ten-year-old boy from New York State. “This was not a case of novice street fighting,” says Jeff. “He was highly organized and competing his dogs against a major organized gang.”

Teachers in Chicago schools tell stories of eight-year-olds in their second grade classes who are discussing fighting dogs when they should be studying math or social studies. In the rural South, there are entire families that participate in the training and fighting of dogs, like a family business or a casual hobby.

Contrary to popular belief, involvement in animal fighting has little correlation to race or socioeconomic status. “It has nothing to do with their level of education,” explains Dr. Melinda Merck, ASPCA Senior Director of Veterinary Forensic Sciences. “It doesn’t matter how much money they have or what kind of car they drive. People who are involved in blood sport enterprises are doing it because they love the blood sport. Those who need the violence want it in their lives.” Dr. Merck has been involved in numerous dog fighting cases, including Michael Vick’s, and is often called to testify in court as an expert witness. She says it’s a mentality that traces back to Roman times, when everyone would gather in a coliseum and pit lion against man. “Blood sports are violent sports where the participants don’t have choices. That is why it’s criminal. Helpless victims are being forced into these matches by violent, depraved individuals, which is something that society recognizes as threatening and offensive. The concern is how that will spill over into the rest of society.”

While many dog fighters are also involved in gang activities, and most known offenders also have a history of drug-related arrests or convictions, many young people also find themselves involved in the activity through family members who either participate as spectators or are fighting dogs themselves. When children become involved in dog fighting this way, it can be extremely difficult to intervene, but no less necessary. According to Dr. Merck, many states have penalties for being a spectator at a dog fighting or cockfighting match, and yet children are often brought to these events. “If criminal acts are being performed in the vicinity of a child, it is in many states considered cruelty to the child, or child endangerment. But it’s not just the dog fighting,” she continues, “it’s the training of the dogs, too. The methods by which these dogs are trained can be extremely cruel, and being cruel to the dog affects the child.”

It is not hopeless. According to Dr. Merck, “There is more opportunity for rehab and intervention for children who are growing up in areas where dog fighting is accepted, but it has to start young.” The reality is that these areas are filled with pit bulls or pit bull-type dogs—and banning the breed is not the answer. “Someone has to teach these kids compassion and help them understand that these animals are not born to fight. Some of them believe that it is the only purpose of the breed. That mentality has to change.”

One program designed to do just that is Lug-Nuts, a part of the “Training Wheels” program developed by Sue Sternberg, the founder and director of Rondout Valley Animals for Adoption, a not-for-profit animal shelter in upstate New York. Sue developed the program to suit the needs of high-crime

urban areas, where most dog fights are not organized fights, but spontaneous street fights between teenagers. The program offers kids and adults an equally competitive alternative to fighting their dogs—weight pulling. The types of dogs typically used for fighting make great prospects for weight pulling competitions—and the activity offers many of the same elements of the dog fights, including the boost of self-esteem many kids are looking for, without the cruelty and violence. If you feel that dog fighting is an issue in your school and community, visit www.suesternberg.com for more information about the Lug-Nuts program, and how you may be able to bring it to your area.

Dog fighting is now a felony in all 50 states, but it still goes on in cities and states across the country with disturbing frequency. The Michael Vick case was only different than the others in that Vick’s celebrity status brought national media attention to the case, bringing the plight of fighting dogs into the public eye. Once a positive role model for his young fans, Vick got a different kind of attention for his involvement in these cruel and illegal activities, and inspired the next generation of animal advocates to speak out against these atrocities.

Gradually, we are heading down the path to change for these animals. As each state and agency begin to take animal fighting investigations more seriously, and the laws and penalties get stronger, we will continue to crack down on each operation and put an end to the “sport” one community at a time.

Michael Vick’s dogs lived a horrible life, and those who died—died a horrible death. However, if the momentum borne from his case continues, perhaps a day will come when we can look back and say that those dogs didn’t fight and die in vain.

WORD BANK

HOG-DOG FIGHTING: When a dog is pitted against a feral pig, or hog.

BADGER-BAITING: When a dog is pitted against a badger.

TRUNKING: When two dogs are thrown into the trunk of a car to fight.

BULLFIGHTING: Bullfighting takes place in many countries, and has developed several forms or styles. The three main styles of bullfighting are Spanish, Portuguese and French. All forms are based on stressing, exhausting, injuring and/or killing bulls.



Activity Sheet 1 Grades 3-5

Dogs have been bred for a variety of reasons, both good and bad. In the first part of this activity, students will discover why certain dogs have been bred for different roles and/or jobs, based on their physical make-up, instinct and trainability. A list of dogs is provided and students can choose one additional dog to research.



The second part of this activity aims to demonstrate that dogs can excel in roles for which they were bred (and perhaps those for which they were not bred) in fun, legal and humane ways. This is especially true for the American Pit Bull terrier, who is popularly known as a fighting dog. These dogs can succeed in many other engaging and lawful activities, including agility and weight pulling.

Discuss the results with the class. Students can also create a display for outside the classroom to educate the rest of the school population.

STANDARDS:

NSTA Science #3:
Life Science

NCTE English Language Arts #4:
Communication Skills

NCTE English Language Arts #8:
Developing Research Skills

Activity Sheet 2 Grades 6-8

In this activity, your students will define the terms *myth* and *stereotype*, and find antonyms for them. They will then search websites for information that refutes common myths and stereotypes about pit bulls. They will then create a wiki page containing the information they found online.

Myth—*a widely held but mistaken belief* (Encarta Dictionary), a fiction or half-truth, especially one that forms part of an ideology (American Heritage Dictionary). Antonym—*fact*.



Stereotype—*a conventional, formulaic, and oversimplified conception, opinion or image* (American Heritage Dictionary), *a generalization, usually exaggerated or oversimplified and often offensive, that is used to describe or distinguish a group* (American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition).

Antonym of *stereotype*—*fact, veracity*.

Antonym—*a word that means the opposite of another word* (Encarta Dictionary).

There are a number of sites on the Internet at which you can set up wiki accounts for you and your students. Many of these sites are free for everyone or offer free services to educators.

At www.educationaltools.wikispaces.com/Wikitools, you can find a number of sites from which to choose.

After you create the classroom wiki, ask your students to create pages that reflect some of the myths and stereotypes about pit bulls and dog fighting and information to refute them. At www.pbrc.net/poppysplace/Education/education.html and forpitsake.org/, students can read about pit bulls who served in the military, were search-and-rescue dogs, therapy dogs and movie and television stars. Your students can also visit Best Friends at www.bestfriends.org and Best Friends Dogtown, at www.bestfriends.org/dogtown/ for stories on rescued pit bulls including those from the Michael Vick case. You may allow students to edit each others' work or just view the work. Once the wiki is fully edited you can allow it to be viewed by those outside your classroom. This will enable your students to dispel some of the myths and stereotypes surrounding this issue.

*Please make sure your students do not provide any personal or identifying information on their wiki page. Some providers will not allow participation by students under the age of 13.

STANDARDS:

NCTE English Language Arts #1: Reading for Perspective

NCTE English Language Arts #3: Evaluation Strategies

NCTE English Language Arts #4: Communication Skills

NCTE English Language Arts #5: Communication Strategies

NCTE English Language Arts #6: Applying Knowledge

NCTE English Language Arts #11: Participating In Society

NCTE English Language Arts #12: Applying Language Skills

NETS Technology #3: Technology: Productivity Tools

NETS Technology #4: Technology Communication Tools

NETS Technology #5: Technology Research Tools



Activity Sheet 3 Grades 6-8

In this lesson students will research the history and current state of blood sports. After students complete the research, they will educate others in their school and/or in their community on their findings. How they chose to educate others can be determined by you or the students, depending on time constraints and available materials.

STANDARDS:

NCTE English Language Arts #6:

Communication Skills

NCTE English Language Arts #8:

Developing Research Skills

NCTE English Language Arts #12:

Applying Language Skills

NCSS World History #7:

An Age of Revolutions, 1750-1914

NCSS World History ERA #9:

The 20th Century Since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes

NCSS World History ERA #9:

The 20th Century Since 1945: Promises and Paradoxes

NCSS U.S. History #2 ERA 2:

Colonization and Settlement

NCSS U.S. History #6 ERA 6:

The Development of the Industrial United States (1870-1900)

NCSS U.S. History #10 ERA 10:

Contemporary United States (1968 To The Present)



Activity Sheet 4 Grades 3-8

This activity sheet provides students with a list of facts about animal fighting. They include a brief description of animal fighting, the types of animal fighting and the laws that are in place to protect animals. Distribute the sheet to your students and initiate a discussion based on the facts listed.

Your students may be encouraged to take action! Ask your students how they can help animals and fight animal cruelty. The following is a list of service projects for students you can suggest to initiate the discussion.

Blog about it! Join the ASPCA Online Community at <http://aspcacommunity.ning.com/> to share and talk about animal issues. You must be thirteen years old to join.

Start a petition about an animal welfare issue in your community or school.

Organize an awareness campaign in your school.

STANDARDS:

NCTE English Language Arts #1:

Reading for Perspective

NCTE English Language Arts # 5:

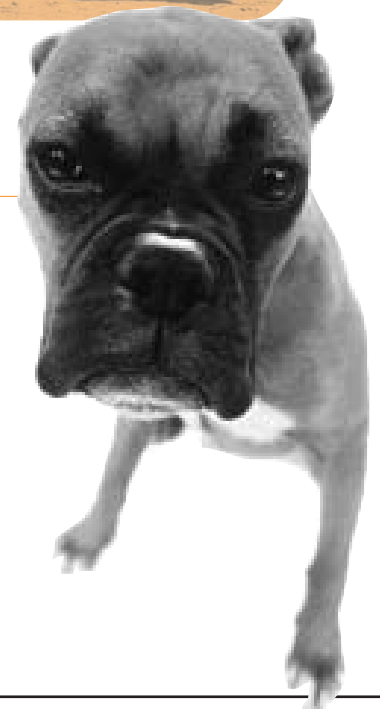
Communication Strategies

NCSS Social Studies #5:

Role of the Citizen

NETS Technology #4:

Technology Communication Tools





Activity Sheet 1



Dog Behavior

Throughout history, dogs have been bred for a variety of reasons based on their physical make-up, instinct and trainability. Research the following dogs to learn about their biological and temperamental make-up, their relationships to humans and their roles or jobs in today's society.



Australian Cattle Dog



Parson Russell Terrier



Labrador Retriever



American Staffordshire Terrier



Toy Poodle



Siberian Husky

A breed of your choice

Research the following activities in which dogs can participate. Once you have completed your research, determine which dogs listed above are best suited for each activity. (Each dog may fit into one or multiple categories).

- ✓ Agility Training
- ✓ Rally Obedience
- ✓ Weight Pulling
- ✓ Show
- ✓ Freestyle
- ✓ Flying Disc
- ✓ Fly Ball

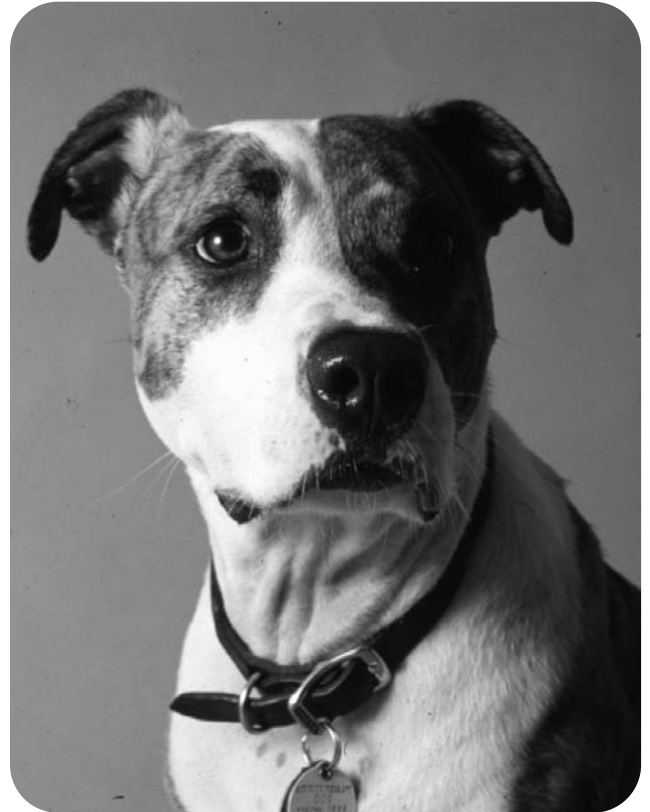


The Truth About Pits

Look in the dictionary and define the following two words:

Myth (n.) **Stereotype (n.)**

Now that you know the definitions of myth and stereotype, what do you think are their antonyms? Don't know the definition of antonym? Look up that word in the dictionary too!



There are many myths and stereotypes about pit bulls. These dogs are also called American Pit Bull terriers and American Staffordshire terriers. Unfortunately, these dogs are often used in dog fights. In dog fights, two dogs fight while people watch and bet on which animal will win. It is a very brutal contest, and it is illegal in all 50 states.

Visit www.pbrc.net/poppysplace/Education/education.html to get some facts about pit bulls and to read about some pit bulls who've been heroes and some who are famous for other reasons—like being a TV star! You may surf this website, (www.forpitsake.org/) to read about pit bulls who are therapy dogs and search-and-rescue dogs.

Create a wiki page (more vocabulary!). The word “wiki” means fast in Hawaiian, and wikis are a way to collaborate (work together) on a project. Using wiki technology you and your classmates can quickly create a website about the myths, stereotypes and facts about pit bulls and dog fighting.

Your teacher set up a wiki for your class. Create a wiki page that lists one of the myths or stereotypes about pit bulls. Then write a story about a pit bull that defies (goes against) the myth or stereotype and post the story on your wiki page. After the class wiki is complete, your class and teacher can decide on the best way to share it with others.



History Lesson

The Michael Vick case exposed the cruel reality of dog fighting to the world. However, dog fighting and other blood sports (any sport or contest involving the killing of an animal) are not new to our society and date back many centuries.

Research the history of the following blood sports to learn how they came into existence and their role in today's society.

- ✓ Dog Fighting
- ✓ Hog-dog fighting
- ✓ Cockfighting
- ✓ Badger-baiting
- ✓ Bullfighting
- ✓ Coon on a Log
- ✓ Hare Coursing



Use the following questions to guide your research.











- ✓ Describe the blood sport.
- ✓ When and where did this blood sport originate?
- ✓ How did the blood sport begin?
- ✓ Were there any objections, either politically or publicly, at any point throughout its existence? If so, what were the objections? Which groups objected?
- ✓ Are there any current laws or regulations for these blood sports?
- ✓ What is the current public attitude towards each of the blood sports? If you can't find this information in your research, conduct your own research with family, friends and others in your community.

When you have completed your research, educate others on your findings. If possible, work with other classmates to create a public service announcement, a website or host an information session during lunchtime. Can you think of any other ways to educate the public about animal fighting?



Animal Fighting Facts



-  Animal fighting is a blood sport (any sport or contest involving the killing of an animal) in which animals are specifically bred and trained to fight each other within an enclosed pit or ring, while people watch and place bets.
-  There are people who promote or participate in dog fighting from every community and background.
-  The most common dog used for fighting in the United States is the American Pit Bull Terrier.
-  Cockfighting and Dog fighting are **ILLEGAL** in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.
-  Cockfighting remains legal in the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Philippines, Mexico, many areas of Southeast Asia, Central and South America and some parts of France.
-  According to a 1997 study done by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Northeastern University, animal abusers are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people.
-  In bullfighting, the matador's goal is to plunge the sword between the bull's withers into the aorta.
-  Today, 45 states and the District of Columbia enacted laws that make some forms of animal cruelty a felony charge; in the remaining states, all forms of animal cruelty are misdemeanors.
-  NFL quarterback Michael Vick was sentenced to 23 months in federal prison for dog fighting. This is at the higher end of the federal sentencing guidelines of 18 to 24 months and an historic moment in animal fighting prosecution.
-  Other types of animal fighting include trunking (two dogs are thrown into the trunk of a car to fight), hog-dog fighting (a dog is pitted against a feral pig or hog) and badger-baiting (when a dog or dogs are pitted against a badger).

If you would like more information on animal fighting and how you can help animals in your community, visit www.aspca.org.