YOU HAVE a blind neighbor who uses a guide dog in and outside of the home. You have a relative who farms and uses a dog to herd cattle. Your cousin competes in equestrian events on her horse, and you always enter an animal in the state fair for FFA. Pets help humans in many ways, but they will be happier and healthier if we select the appropriate breed for our needs and wants.

Objective:

Describe companion animals and how they benefit humans.

Key Terms:

- Angora fur
- bitch
- buck
- carnivores
- companion animal
- declawed
- doe
- hairball
- herding dog
- hound
- kindling
- kitten
- litter
- monogastric animals
- non-sporting breed
- normal fur
- puppies
- queen
- Rex fur
- satin fur
- sporting dog
- stud dog
- terrier
- tomcat
- toy breed
- whelping
- working dog

Pets

Pets can fill many roles in the lives of humans. Yet it is necessary to know about specific breeds before determining which companion animal is the best to meet your needs.
BENEFITS OF COMPANION ANIMALS

A companion animal (pet) is an animal that is used to provide humans with fun and friendship through close association. Although dogs and cats are the most common, ferrets, gerbils, hamsters, and fish are other examples of companion animals.

Some companion animals are used for services or sports. For instance, dogs often serve the visually impaired. Dogs may also be used to protect property or to herd livestock. Horses may be used in rodeos or in different racing events.

DOG CHARACTERISTICS

Dogs have been kept as companion animals for more than 10,000 years. Although they are naturally carnivores (meat eaters), dogs do consume processed dog food. These monogastric animals (animals with one stomach compartment) are known by scientists as Canis familiaris, so some people call dogs “canines.”

A mature female dog is a bitch, and a mature male dog is a sire or a stud dog. Whelping is the process of a bitch giving birth, and the immature dogs (of both sexes) are puppies. The litter is the group of puppies born to the parents.

The skeletal systems of dogs contain approximately 320 bones. The size of the bones depends on the size of the dog. For example, a large dog will have larger bones than a smaller dog. The difference in size also affects their weight at maturity. Weight can range from less than 6 pounds to almost 200 pounds.

In the United States, the American Kennel Club (AKC) does the classification and record keeping on dog breeds. Although there are approximately 300 different breeds, the AKC has identified seven classes of dogs based on use and characteristics: herding dogs, sporting dogs, working dogs, hounds, terriers, toy breeds, and non-sporting breeds.

Herding Dog

A herding dog is an animal easily trained to work with cattle or sheep. This dog type requires much space and likes to run frequently. The Australian cattle dog, German shepherd, Collie, and Shetland sheepdog are examples of herding dogs.

FIGURE 1. This dog is on a hike with its master.
**Sporting Dog**

A **sporting dog** is an animal used for purposes like hunting, but they can be used for finding, flushing out, and retrieving game animals. Spaniels, retrievers, setters, and pointers are all examples of sporting dogs.

**Working Dog**

A **working dog** is an animal used by humans to accomplish a task. For instance, police use trained dogs to locate illegal drugs in home and vehicle searches. People use dogs for sledding and racing in Alaska, and dogs can help the visually impaired. The Alaskan malamute, Doberman pinscher, Saint Bernard, and Rottweiler are all working dogs.

**Hound**

A **hound** is a dog that has an excellent sense of smell and is often used for tracking purposes. Police may use these dogs to find escaped convicts or missing children. The beagle, greyhound, basset, and dachshund are all hounds.

**Terrier**

A **terrier** is a dog that digs into the ground to capture its prey. There are 25 terrier breeds recognized by the AKC. The miniature schnauzer, Airedale, Scottish terrier, and bull terrier are examples of terriers.

**Toy Breed**

A **toy breed** is a name describing dogs that weigh between 4 and 16 pounds. They live longer than larger breeds and are easier to keep in small areas because of their size. The Chihuahua, toy poodle, Yorkshire terrier, and English toy spaniel are all examples of toy breeds.

**Non-Sporting Breed**

The **non-sporting breed** are dogs bred for purposes other than sport. The dalmatian, poodle, and bulldog are examples of non-sporting dogs.

**CAT CHARACTERISTICS**

Approximately 60 million cats are kept as companion animals in the United States. Most cats live between 12 and 18 years, but they can live to be 30. Typically they weigh between 6 and 15 pounds when mature, and their life processes are similar to those of other mammals. However, the skeletal system is extremely complex, allowing cats to be quick and agile for survival in the wild.
Cats have approximately 250 bones and 500 muscles. They differ from other animals in that they have extremely sensitive ears, noses, and paws. They also have extra taste organs, enabling them to distinguish between foods.

These animals have three-dimensional vision. In addition, their whiskers are attached to nerves and allow them to find their way in the dark. Cats are in the same family as tigers and lions and share the same foot structure.

**Terminology**

A mature male cat is a **tomcat**, and a mature female cat is a **queen**. A baby cat of either sex is a **kitten**, and a group of kittens born to the same parents is a litter. Although cats are carnivores (meat eaters), they typically consume processed cat food. However, some cats—especially those living outdoors—dine on mice and rats.

When cats are domesticated, owners often have them **declawed** (the claws are surgically removed by a veterinarian) to avoid damage to furniture, curtains, and carpeting. As a result, these cats should not be allowed outdoors because they have lost their main defense mechanism.

**Short-Haired and Long-Haired Breeds**

There are two classes of purebred cats: short-haired and long-haired. There are 36 cat breeds found in the United States. Short-haired breeds are more popular because they require no brushing and shed less. The rex, Siamese, American shorthair, Burmese, Japanese bobtail, Manx, Russian blue, and korat are all examples of short-haired breeds.

As previously stated, the long-haired breeds require brushing and do shed. In addition, these cats lick themselves and commonly have hairballs as a result. A **hairball** is a wad of hair that collects inside the digestive tract and blocks food digestion. The Turkish Angora, Himalayan, Persian, Balinese, and Maine coon are all examples of long-haired breeds.

**RABBITS**

All domestic rabbits are descendants of wild rabbits. They are found throughout the world and can become nuisances because of their eating habits and rapid reproductive ability.
**Terminology**

The anatomy of wild and domesticated rabbits is the same. A male rabbit is a **buck**, and a female rabbit is a **doe**. When a female rabbit gives birth, it is called **kindling**. A group of rabbits born at the same time is a **litter**.

**Breeds of Rabbits**

The American Rabbit Breeders Association (ARBA) recognizes 42 different breeds of rabbits that are broken into four fur types: normal, satin, rex, and angora. **Normal fur** is fur that has long guard hairs that protect a dense undercoat. In contrast, **satin fur** has luster, is composed of transparent hair, and is finer than normal fur.

**Rex fur** is fur that has a very soft feel because it is dense. Also, the undercoat and guard hairs are the same length. **Angora fur**, on the other hand, is used to manufacture clothing because of its long wool-like fibers. Regardless of the fur type, rabbits should be kept clean and tame to prevent injury to the handlers as well as to the animals.

**Competitions**

Many people raise rabbits for 4-H and FFA projects. Then they show the animals at local or state events. Shows are an opportunity to compete, learn about other breeds, and hear about management options. It is also interesting to see how your rabbits compare to those of other people.

**Summary:**

A companion animal is an animal that is used to provide humans with fun and friendship through close association.

Dogs are monogastric carnivores. A mature female is a bitch, and a mature male is a sire or stud dog. Whelping is the process of a bitch giving birth to puppies (baby dogs) in a litter. The AKC has identified seven classes of dogs based on use and characteristics: herding dogs, sporting dogs, working dogs, hounds, terriers, toy breeds, and non-sporting breeds.
A mature male cat is a tomcat, and a mature female cat is a queen. The babies born in a litter are kittens. These carnivores can be long-haired or short-haired cats.

A male rabbit is a buck, and a female rabbit is a doe. When a female rabbit gives birth to a litter, it is called kindling. The American Rabbit Breeders Association (ARBA) recognizes 42 different breeds of rabbits that are broken into four fur types: normal, satin, rex, and angora.

**Checking Your Knowledge:**

1. What are the seven classes of dogs?
2. What is the AKC?
3. Approximately how many bones and muscles are in a cat?
4. What do you call a male rabbit and a female rabbit?
5. What are the four fur types for rabbits?

**Expanding Your Knowledge:**

Research rabbits online. Then raise a rabbit to enter in the state fair or another competition. You may also want to attend a training session for service dogs to learn more about these talented animals.

**Web Links:**

- **Be a Responsible Dog Owner**
  
  http://www.akc.org/public_education/responsible_dog_owner.cfm

- **Grooming Your Cat**
  
  https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care/cat-grooming-tips

- **Rabbit Breeds**
  
  http://exoticpets.about.com/cs/rabbits/a/rabbitbreeds.htm

- **Service Animals**
  
  https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm

- **Your Complete Cat Ownership Guide**
  
  http://www.hobbyandlifestyle.com/cat-ownership-tips.html