



## Working Animals

**WORKING ANIMALS**, especially horses, didn't always have the best life. In 1866 in New York City, Henry Bergh, a wealthy, well-connected American diplomat, took up the fight against the poor treatment of working horses. Struck by the sight of hardworking horses being beaten into submission while pulling overloaded carriages, and the general apathy toward our working animal partners by citizens, he was inspired to form America's first humane organization, The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)®.

For most of our history, animals have been our partners, working by our sides. Often when we think of "working animals," farm animals come to mind. Indeed, animals have always been an integral part of farm life—horses pull equipment to plow fields, oxen haul water, goats pull carts, and chickens lay eggs. But as our country began the shift, from an agrarian to an industrialized society, the work power of horses also began to shift, from the all-duty farm helper to the working city horse. Industrialization allowed the rapid manufacture of more goods, and the strong, obedient horse was pressed into service pulling wagons filled with materials to distribute far and wide.

**DOGS**, although mainly thought of as our companions, have a long history of working with humans. Archeological evidence suggests that dogs have been domesticated for over 12,000 years! As recently as the mid-1800's, dogs were pressed into service pulling carts—the poor man's alternative to a horse and carriage—until local laws were enacted banning the practice.

**CATS**, too, have a working history. For thousand of years cats provided people with effective rodent and pest control, as well as companionship. In ancient Egypt, cats provided rodent control and protected the granaries. They achieved important status in ancient Egyptian society, living much as our pet cats do today—as an integral part of the family.

**Fast forward 140 years, and you will see that animals still perform many and varied jobs.**

**HORSES** still exist in American cities, not for transportation or drayage but rather for recreation—pulling hansom cabs for rides in the parks, or as a partner to a police officer. The carriage horse industry today is regulated and watchdog groups are continually lobbying for even more stringent regulations regarding horses' working conditions. Police horses have a very important job to do. They work with their police officer partners, providing transportation and helping to keep our cities and towns safe. Horses are more agile than cars; they can turn quickly, squeeze into spaces cars cannot



and most importantly, their great height provides a perfect perch for their police officer partner to see all around. Police horses are excellent in crowd control situations, as well as providing opportunities for good will between the public and the police. A polite request to pet a police horse will probably be rewarded with a yes, and a positive encounter with a member of the police department.

**DOGS**, too, have continued to play a role in our society as workers. There are many opportunities for canines in the field of law enforcement. Dogs, because of their keen sense of smell and desire to please, can be successfully trained to sniff out narcotics, explosives and even human beings. Law enforcement agencies as varied as the FBI, US Customs, Homeland Security and local police departments, all depend on dogs to help them perform their jobs.

Dogs are also used in search and rescue operations. Tornados, earthquakes, building collapses, cave-ins and avalanches are all emergency situations where search and rescue dogs may be called upon to help locate survivors. Service animals, like seeing-eye dogs for the blind or hearing/signal dogs for the deaf, are extremely well trained to work with their human partners. A service dog provides his owner with the opportunity for a more independent lifestyle. Dogs can be trained to work with people who use wheelchairs or have

limited arm movement. They can learn to retrieve dropped objects as small as a dime. They are able to pull and push wheelchairs, and turn switches on and off. Service dogs usually begin training when they're puppies, and after 8-12 months of intense training may graduate to be partnered with a human.

**THERAPY ANIMALS** also have an important job to do. Along with their human partners, they visit nursing home residents, hospital patients, and classroom students. Therapy animals work together with their human partners as part of a team. They must be patient and tolerant with new people and places as well as unfamiliar smells and sounds. The work is so rewarding! Sometimes cuddling with a warm, friendly animal is just what's needed to help a sick child, or a shut-in elderly person feel happy. Teams also visit classrooms to teach humane education programs such as pet care and bite prevention. Organizations like the Delta Society provide training programs, testing and registration for pet-partner teams. A registered therapy animal has proven that he or she is more than up for the task—a lot of work goes into training. Some therapy animals

are dogs, yet there are pet-partner teams consisting of humans with cats, rabbits, and even horses.

Another field of work where animals have an important job is in the **ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY**. All types of animals work in films, television and live theatre. Training for acting work is as intense for an animal actor as it is for a human actor—sometimes even more so! Animal actors are not limited to companion animals like dogs and cats. Wild animals like bears, big cats and apes appear in film and television productions and must be highly trained to answer commands and stay focused on the task at hand. Animal trainers for the entertainment industry choose animals who have the right tendencies for success in the field. Calm, patient and intelligent animals do well in the entertainment industry, provided they've been properly trained. There are even talent agencies that represent strictly four-legged clients. The American Humane Association (AHA), a national animal welfare organization, provides oversight on film and television locations in the United States to ensure the proper and humane treatment of animal actors. And, yes, animal actors do get paid to perform!



**A** NIMALS ARE MORE THAN JUST OUR PETS. JUST AS THEY HELPED HUMANS IN THE PAST BY PLOWING OUR FIELDS, PULLING CARTS AND DELIVERING OUR GOODS, THEY HELP PEOPLE TODAY BY PERFORMING IMPORTANT TASKS.

The humane and respectful treatment of working animals is as important today as it was in the past. Some of the ways students can become involved in the betterment of the lives of working animals is to become aware of issues surrounding working animals. Recently a group of middle school students in New York City, after learning of the death of a hansom cab horse on the streets of the city, organized and created a petition to present to the city council. They proposed better oversight of the carriage horse industry and limits on where and when the horses could

work. These students learned about the issue of working horses in the city, created an action plan, and implemented that plan, while teaching their classmates and families about the power of civic involvement.

Elephants are still being used for illegal logging in southeast Asia. In India and Pakistan, dancing bears still commonly work for the livelihood of their owners. The exploitation and mistreatment of these working animals are just some examples

of issues around the world that students can get involved in. Petitions, letter writing and bringing attention to the plight of some working animals presents a challenging service learning opportunity for your students.

**WSPA.org**  
[www.FBI.gov/fbikids.htm](http://www.FBI.gov/fbikids.htm)  
 (great site about working dogs)  
**AHA.org**  
**Deltasociety.org**