

WHO LET THE CATS OUT?

Grades 2 to 6 - Class, large group

This activity works best with a large class (e.g. 20+ students) and requires space such as a large classroom, gymnasium or outdoor field. Students will investigate the similarities and differences between the needs of cats and birds and discover the impact on wildlife when cats are permitted to roam freely in the outdoor environment. Students will also learn about actions humans can take to protect both cats and birds.

PRE-ACTIVITY: Discuss the needs of cats (domestic animal) and birds (wild animal) and how those needs are met by each species. Discuss threats posed by free-roaming cats to wildlife. Explain to students beforehand that there is no clear winner in this game and the purpose is to see what happens based upon the relationship between the “cats” and the “birds” in the game.

ITEMS NEEDED:

- ▶ Approximately 5-15 (depending on class size) hula hoops, pieces of rope, flattened cardboard box or similar to mark small perimeter for “nests”
- ▶ 100-200 (depending on class size) small pieces of paper, ping pong balls, pieces of lego, or similar to represent “resources”
- ▶ Pen and paper to record findings of activity

ACTIVITY PROCESS:

- ▶ **Assign student roles:**
 - Designate one student as a “cat”, the rest of the students will be “songbirds”
- ▶ **Preparation:**
 - Record how many songbirds are in the game at the beginning (e.g. 1 cat, 29 songbirds)
 - Mark a space which will represent the cat’s “home”
 - Ask songbirds to find a mate (partner) – each pair of songbirds requires a “nest” marked by a perimeter
 - Distribute “resources” around the play area not too close to the nests; these are the items songbirds will collect representing food, water, nesting material, etc.
 - **NOTE:** For older students, you can differentiate the resources and allocate how many of each resource the songbirds should try to collect
- ▶ **Play:**
 - To begin, the cat should remain in their home
 - Songbirds should move around the area of play to access resources – for each resource they collect, they should return to the nest to deposit it



SONGBIRD RULES:

- They cannot collect multiple resources at once, only one at a time
- When a resource is picked up, they must return to the nest
- They cannot return to the nest without a resource
- The nest is a safe space from the cat but only one bird can be in the nest at one time
- When songbirds begin collecting resources, "Let the cat out". Set a timer for 30-60 seconds (adjust time based on how quickly the cat is catching the songbirds). The cat will try to tag as many birds as possible and bring them back to its home. Songbirds will continue to try to collect resources and return to their nest while evading the cat.



CAT RULES:

- Cats cannot tag a bird that is in its nest (safe space)
- The cat must bring the songbird to the cat's home
- The cat can only catch one songbird at a time
- The caught songbird remains in the cat's home, the cat goes back to the area of play to catch another songbird
- Songbirds caught by the cat become another cat in the next round
- At the end of 30-60 seconds (first round), count how many birds are left and record (e.g. 1 cat, 27 birds left)
- Second round – begin again, letting the original cat out of the home as well as any new cats (songbirds that have been caught by the cat); give them the same time limit
- At the end of round two, count how many birds are left and record (e.g. 2 cats, 20 birds left)
- Repeat for third round (or more depending on number of birds still available)

DEBRIEF:

► Discuss:

- What happened when the cats were let out of their home?
- How did it feel for the cats? How did it feel for the birds?
- What was the difference between one cat outdoors compared to many? Were birds caught more quickly?
- In real life, what might be some other consequences of the cats being around? (e.g. a bird has to stay in its nest and can't get food, or can't get back to its nest to feed its babies) Are there other species affected?
- Is this a cat problem or a human problem? What can humans do to protect birds and other wildlife?
- Additional learning: Older students may graph the outcomes of this activity (number of cats outdoors in relation to the number of songbirds affected)