Part 3 **Service-Learning Project**

CHALLENGING TeachKind
ASSUMPTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Part 3 of "Challenging Assumptions" will guide you through overseeing a student-led service-learning project. Using knowledge gained in Parts 1 and 2 of the curriculum, students will work collaboratively to identify an animal-related problem in their community, brainstorm possible solutions, and plan and execute one of them to effect measurable change. They will then assess the effectiveness of their chosen solution and identify ways of improving outcomes as well as ways for individuals to continue making efforts to solve the problem.

STEP 1: REFLECT ON PREVIOUS LESSONS (DAY 1)

Remind students about some of the major assignments they worked on throughout the year and about the overarching theme of *challenging assumptions*. Ask them to spend about 10 minutes writing about the assumptions that they challenged over the last few months. Ask a few volunteers to share what they learned this year. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:

- Did your understanding of the psychological phenomenon of *cognitive dissonance* guide your behavior this school year? If so, how? If not, describe a particular area in which you might be able to work on aligning your actions with your beliefs.

- What parallels were your able to draw between society's treatment of animals and the historical discrimination against people of color, women, the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and others who have been and continue to be marginalized or systemically denied basic human rights?

- In your own words, what is *speciesism*? What impact does it have on society?

- Describe what it would look like to take all living, feeling beings into consideration in the fight for social justice.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY A PROBLEM (DAYS 1 TO 7)

Have students complete the service-learning project survey to begin gathering information about animal-related problems in their community. Have them interview neighbors, business owners, and other members of the community to learn what animal-related problems these individuals have identified and would like to see resolved. Students can use the questions on the survey as well as questions of their own.

Additionally, have students watch and read the news daily to find stories about animals. Have them write down a brief description of each news segment, adding more descriptions whenever they come across new animal-related stories. After about a week, have them write a summary of their observations about news coverage of animals. Are there more positive or negative stories? How many are about cruelty to animals? What similarities do students notice among the stories?

Have students work in small groups to analyze the data collected from the service-learning project survey and their observations about news coverage of animals.
Have each group propose one animal-related problem in their community to work on, using the questions listed below to guide their discussions.
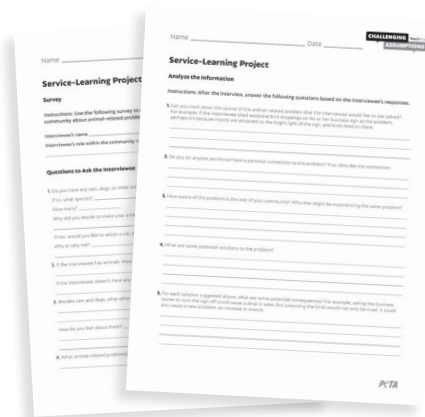
Questions to Guide Student Discussion

- What conclusions can you draw from the data collected in your service-learning project surveys?
  ◦ Did everyone in your group have similar responses?
  ◦ Did anyone have a response to a question that no one else had?
 ◦ What were you surprised to learn from your groupmates' responses?

- What conclusions can you draw from the data collected in your interviews with community members?
  ◦ Did the people you interviewed have similar responses?
  ◦ Did anyone have a response to a question that no one else had?
  ◦ Did the roles that people play in your community influence their responses? For example, how might business owners' motivations influence their opinions of wildlife?
  ◦ What were you surprised to learn in your interviews?

- What conclusions can you draw from the data collected in your observations of the news?
  ◦ Did your group have similar observations?
  ◦ Did anyone observe something that no one else did?
  ◦ What were you surprised to learn from your groupmates' observations?

Alternatively, students can choose as their problem one of the areas they learned about during the school year in which the largest numbers of animals suffer the most intensely for the longest periods of time: experimentation, agriculture, the clothing industry, or entertainment.

Write the animal-related problem that each group proposes on the board. Have a member of each group explain why they chose that problem. Here are some examples:

- Chained dogs
- Homeless cats and dogs and overburdened animal shelters
- Sales of betta fish at a local pet store
- Classroom dissection
- A local roadside zoo, marine park, or animal-based circus

Have students vote to determine which problem they should work together to try to solve for the service-learning project.
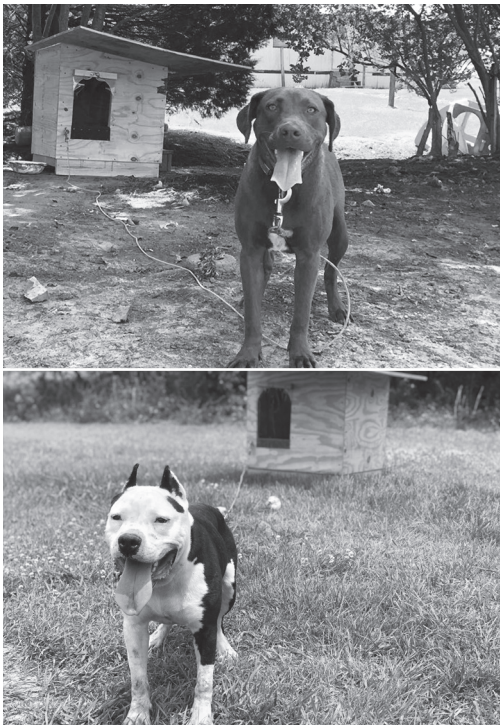
STEP 3: BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS (DAYS 8 AND 9)

Next, have students suggest possible solutions to their chosen problem off the top of their head and write them on the board. Then, have them conduct research on these solutions and others. For example, possible solutions to the problem of chained dogs might include the following:

- Urging neighbors who keep their dogs chained outside to keep them indoors
- Passing out informational leaflets about the problems with dog chaining in the community
- Contacting law enforcement in cases of abuse
- Attending town hall meetings to push for legislation that would ban dog chaining

Remind students to keep in mind Peter Singer's philosophy of equal consideration of interests as they explore solutions to their designated problem. The solutions to any problems within their community should consider the interests of all individuals affected equally, no matter their species. As students brainstorm solutions to their chosen problem, have them discuss the following question: Is the problem occurring because of speciesist beliefs? As a reminder, speciesism is prejudice or discrimination based on species. For example, some people view dogs as cheap security systems rather than as individuals capable of suffering, which is why they keep them chained up outdoors.

STEP 4: PLAN AND EXECUTE A SOLUTION (DAY 10 TO THE END)

Once students have come up with a list of possible solutions, have them choose one to carry out. Ask them to consider which solution would be the most effective in solving the problem, what resources are available to them, and their timeline. What are their specific goals, and how will they determine whether or not they were successful in achieving them?

For example, working with elected representatives to pass ordinances that ban or restrict tethering is an effective way to help chained dogs. Students may start a petition, write to local newspapers and legislators, and speak at town hall meetings about the need for tethering ordinances in their community.

You can also have students watch *Breaking the Chain*, a documentary about PETA's Animal Rescue Team and its work to help companion animals in impoverished and underserved areas of Virginia and North Carolina. This film will open your students' eyes to the suffering endured by animals trapped in desperate situations, the challenges faced by PETA's fieldworkers as they do everything they can to help them, and the ways everyone can make a difference for cats and dogs in their own community.

To help dogs beyond their community, students may host a "Change for Chained Dogs" fundraiser. You can order a fundraiser pack, which includes student-friendly leaflets and stickers to help spread the word, a poster to help students keep track of their progress toward their fundraising goal, labels to put on donation jars at school, and all the information that they'll need to start raising money. Funds collected support PETA's work constructing and delivering sturdy custom-built doghouses filled with straw bedding for dogs whose owners won't let them live indoors or relinquish them to caring people who will.

STEP 5: ASSESS EFFECTIVENESS AND IDENTIFY WAYS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES (LAST DAY)

Have students compare the outcome of their solution with the goal that they set. Did they meet their goal? If so, what allowed them to achieve this? If not, what could they change about their approach to meet their goal in the future? What problems did they encounter, and how did they overcome them? What measurable change did they make for animals in their community? Encourage students to assess both quantitative data (e.g., how much money they raised) and qualitative data (e.g., living conditions for the animals, feedback from the community, etc.).

Finally, have students brainstorm ways each of them can continue their efforts to solve their designated problem. For example, while the "Change for Chained Dogs" fundraiser is an excellent way to work together to help chained dogs, individuals can keep an eye out for chained dogs in their neighborhoods and use one of the strategies discussed as a solution.

HUMANE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

Whatever animal-related problem your students choose to tackle, there are many humane and fun ways to raise funds to purchase materials needed to carry out your project. By choosing a humane option, you're setting an example for your students and teaching them to respect life, see the bigger picture, and make compassionate decisions that benefit everyone. Check out these animal-friendly fundraiser ideas.

SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT IDEAS

There are many ways to help animals in the community—students are limited only by their imagination. Here are some examples:

- Build doghouses for lonely "outdoor dogs."
- Support your local open-admission animal shelter by organizing a supply drive or volunteering to help care for animals.
- Get your school to ban glue traps on campus.
- Cut out dissection in your school.
- Host a cruelty-free fashion show.
- Get your school to introduce vegan options in the cafeteria.
- Protest animal-based circuses or any other cruel form of entertainment that plans to show up at your school or in your community.