



RedRover Readers Program

**Discussion and Activity
Guide for**

So, What's it Like to Be a Cat?

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Concepts

- What are five ways cats' habits can be different from a person's habits?
- Why ask, what it's like to be a cat?
- How can we learn about a cat?

Greet the Students

Ask students if they have ever *seen* a cat. Tell the students they are going to learn about a pet cat who lives with a family.

Before Reading

Share the book cover with the students. Ask students to describe the cover and make predictions about what they see. Allow students to form their own ideas; they can revise their ideas as you read the story.

- Who is shown?
- Who is asking the question, "So, what's it like to be a cat?"
- What is the boy holding?
- Why is the cat upside down?

Share the title pages with the students.

- What is today's assignment?
- Why would a boy want to interview a cat?
- Why would the boy take notes during the interview with the cat?

Clarify Vocabulary

Clarify the word "interview."

Tell students the interview between the boy and the cat is told in rhyme. Show students the first pages, with the illustrations of the boy and the cat. Read aloud, "So what's it like to be a cat?" Then read aloud, "I'm very glad you asked me that."

Ask students where they hear a rhyme (a word with the same vowel sound). Have students identify the rhymes "that" and "cat." Clarify the term "rhyme" for students. Tell students to listen for rhymes while you read the story aloud.

Divide the students into two groups (left and right sides of the circle, students who are wearing short sleeves or long sleeves, etc.) Have one group pretend to be the boy in the story and recite

chorally, “So what’s it like to be a cat?” Have the other group pretend to be the cat in the story and recite, “I’m very glad you asked me that.”

Show students how the boy’s words are in one typeface (font) and the cat’s words are in another typeface (font).

Clarify the word “habits.” Ask students for examples of cat habits based on their previous observations and experience.

During Reading (17 minutes)

Read the story aloud. While reading, return to the question: “Why ask what it’s like to be a cat?” While reading, also ask students to identify ways a cat’s habits are different from a person’s habits.

On the page that shows the cat’s eyes round and yellow, ask: “What is the difference between how the cat sees and how the boy sees?” Tell students that cats can see in one-sixth the amount of light that a human needs to see. Explain to students how the pupil of the cat’s eye can narrow to a slit or become large and round. The cat’s eye also reflects incoming light like a mirror. Ask students: “Cats can see well at night. How could the cat’s habits be different from the boy’s habits because of the difference in their eyes?”

Discuss how animals’ rhythms and sense of time might be different, for example when they eat or sleep. Tell students cats are often active at dawn and dusk, times when the light makes it difficult for people to see, but when cats see well. Suggest students look for cats in their neighborhoods early in the morning when they are leaving for school and late in the evening when they are having dinner.

Ask students to raise their hands if they have seen a cat active in the daytime. Ask students to raise their hands if they have seen a cat active in the nighttime. Tell students cats are active in the daytime and the nighttime. They are not “nocturnal.” A nocturnal animal sleeps in the daytime and is active at night. Ask students, “So, what’s it like to be a cat?”

On the page, “But cats are private creatures...” pause and ask how the cat in the story feels about being alone. Ask students if all cats prefer to be alone. Have students share (briefly) about different cats they know. Have students look at the illustration. How is the cat showing the toddler that he would rather be left alone?

After Reading (5 to 10 minutes)

Ask students to list some of the cat’s habits that they remember from the story. If students need ideas, prompt them using the illustrations.

Ask students:

- Why are cats habits’ different from people’s habits?

- Why would someone want to learn more about a cat's habits? Why would a person ask, "So, what's it like to be a cat?"
- How does the boy learn about his cat's habits?
- We can't ask a cat to tell us in words about a cat's habits. How can we learn about a cat's habits (or another animal's habits)?

Activity: A cat's habits and behaviors

Ask students to recall what they learned about this cat's habits and behaviors (wakes up in the dark, eats in the dark, can see well in the dark, sleeps curled up, sleeps in soft places, sometimes likes to be left alone, likes to nap, leaps and runs and prances, etc.). List the habits and behaviors. Then ask students which behaviors and habits people share with the cat. Circle those. Reinforce that cats and people are similar and different.

Extensions: Choose one or more

A. Interview

Bring a puppet of a cat or a dog or another animal. Pretend you are responding for that animal in the animal's voice. Invite questions from the students so they can interview the animal. Clarify for students that they are interviewing the animal about the animal's habits.

Repeat the activity with another animal puppet.

B. Would I want to be a cat?

Ask students if they would want to be a cat. Listen to students' ideas. Encourage students to base statements on a cat's habits, what it might really be like to be a cat. Remind students that they are speculating, guessing and imagining based on what they have observed and learned about cats.

Have students write or draw reasons they would want to be a cat on one side of a piece of construction paper. Then have students write or draw reasons they like to be a person on the other side of the construction paper. Encourage students to explain their pictures to each other and to you.

C. What's it like to be a cat?

Remind students they just learned about one cat, the cat in the story. This cat has particular habits and behaviors.

Ask students to demonstrate the cat's habits and behaviors as you describe them from the story. Students can spread out or stay at their desks. If they stay in their desks, they can show the cat's habits and behaviors using their hands. Consider turning off the lights if there is enough natural light to work in.

- I wake up in the friendly dark.
- ...slipping out on silent feet
- I search for something nice to eat.
- I tiptoe softly back to bed.
- ...cats are private creatures...
- I leap a lot.
- I run and whisk my tail and dance.
- I whisk my whiskers, pound my paws...

After the students act out the cat's habits, ask students again what other cat habits they have observed. Ask students why, even though all cats have some of the same habits (like being comfortable in the dark since they can see well), some cats have unique habits. Revisit the page that shows "cats are private creatures." Discuss personality of individual animals and moods.

D. Rhyming cat

Have students generate as many words as possible that rhyme with the following words:

- Pounce
- Twirl
- Run
- Jump
- Dance
- Leap

Write the words and rhyming words on a whiteboard or chart paper. Ask students to write a poem about a cat using at least three of the rhyming words you have generated.

E. Pretend to be a cat

Cats have distinct body language that can sometimes be difficult to understand. Help students to better understand what cats are trying to communicate by demonstrating a few cat postures and inviting the students to try them with you. Pretend to be cats together.

Frightened and/or Angry: Get on the floor and cup your hands to your ears backward for ears back and arch your back. Explain that a cat that has his ears back and his back arched and rounded may be frightened and/or angry. Make a "hissing" sound. Explain cats may hiss when they are angry as another signal to stay away.

Frightened/Nervous: (optional: show the illustrations of Ginger in *Ginger Finds a Home*, where she is nervous.) When cats are scared or nervous they slink lower to the ground and their eyes get big. Get on the floor on your hands and knees and then pretend to see something that makes you nervous or scared. Slink low to the ground and make your eyes wide.

Relaxed: Lie on your back and make a "purring" sound and explain that this is a relaxed posture. Ask students to "purr" along with you.

Happy/Content: Cats knead or make biscuits with their front paws when they are happy and content. Pretend to make biscuits and knead bread like a cat might.

Consider reading or using the illustrations from *How to Talk to Your Cat*: www.RedRover.org/books

At the End of the Lesson

Ask students to reflect on the questions, “What did you learn from today’s book and discussion that you didn’t know before?” You can do this with the whole group, in a sharing circle or related class meeting format, by having students fill out index cards, or other formats as you choose. We recommend that you have a variety of formats. After getting a sense of what the students learned, reinforce key themes that they mentioned and add perhaps one or two that you would like them to keep in mind from the key concepts. Also discuss any follow up assignments or take home materials. Remember the students’ responses to the question, “What did you learn?” to add to your report about this reading.