

# Animal heroes?

## DISCOVERY ACTIVITY

### ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES

- To identify some of the different jobs and roles that animals have in our lives past and present
- To explore whether an animal's needs are being met when animals are used for human benefit
- To recognise the differences and similarities between humans and animals, and that animals have feelings and emotions
- To identify the variety of ways animals and humans can work together and appreciate how amazing animals can be

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How do animals feel when doing the jobs they do for us?
- Can an animal think for itself?
- What makes a hero?
- Can an animal be a hero?
- Should animals do dangerous things for humans?

## RESOURCES

- Interactive PDF 'Animal Heroes' to guide pupils through the activities
- Photographs of animal heroes: examples can be found on slides four to five.

This resource is predominantly aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils. Due to the topics covered in the Compassionate Class programme, it is important to consider how different children may react. For more information on creating a safe teaching and learning environment, see guidance on pages five to seven of the Teacher Overview downloadable at: [rspca.org.uk/ccresources](https://rspca.org.uk/ccresources). For information on how to adapt Animal Heroes to support pupils with SEND, see guidance on page eight of this document and pages eight and nine of the Teacher Overview.



# Animal heroes?

## STIMULUS

**10  
MINS**

This session will help children understand all of the amazing ways that animals help humans, whilst recognising that because animals can't choose to help us, we have a responsibility to make sure they are healthy, happy and have their specific needs met.

Start by asking the class: Can an animal think for itself? Can an animal be a hero? Record their thoughts in the box on slide two or print the slide for pupils to write on. This can be used as a baseline assessment to capture pupils' initial understanding and we encourage you to revisit these thoughts at the end of the session.



Slide 2 features the RSPCA and Compassionate Class logos at the top. The title "Animal heroes?" is centered above a pink bar labeled "OUR THOUGHTS". To the left of the writing area are three photographs: a woman interacting with a black dog, a dog jumping over a hurdle, and a dog lying down. A large dashed box for writing is on the right. A small "SLIDE 2" icon with a hand is in the top left corner. A vertical copyright notice "Copyright © RSPCA 2018 All rights reserved." is on the right side of the slide.

**SLIDE  
2**

# Animal heroes?

## STIMULUS: CONTINUED...

### News story about Mandy the hero rat

Show slide three and read the news story as a class. This is based on a real story covered in a BBC documentary.

In areas affected by landmines humans usually use metal detectors to search the area and identify possible mines under the surface. This is dangerous and takes a long time. An African Giant Pouched Rat can be trained to cover the area the size of a tennis court in just 30 minutes, which would take humans four days. Hero rats use their sense of smell to find the explosives and dig the surface when they detect one and get rewarded with a treat. The rats are too light to set off the mines when they step on them making it much safer for them to do this than humans. Hero rats must pass a series of tests before being taken to work in a live landmine area.

To bring the role of the hero rat to life for your class you can watch an animation about them **here**.

If you have time, you can play these real-life videos showing hero rats at work:

1. **A day in the life of a hero rat**
2. **Rats save humans from landmines (Mandy's story)**

### Mandy the record-breaking hero rat

**June, 2014**

Mandy, the African Giant Pouched rat, is making history as one of the fastest hero rats to complete her training.

Hero rats have an important job to do sniffing out landmines so they can be removed and not

harm the people who live near them. Hero rats are light so they don't set the mines off when they stand on them and they can smell the explosives buried deep in the ground. They dig to show the people where the mines are and get rewarded with a treat.

A hero rat's training usually takes a year, but Mandy has passed in just 8 months!



SLIDE  
3



# Animal heroes?

## INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

A blue hand icon with fingers spread, used as a background for the time duration text.

**10-15  
MINS**

Ask the children if they can think of some ways that animals help humans. Use slides four and five to provide some examples, including police dogs and horses, military and fire service dogs, and assistance dogs that support people with disabilities.

Display slide six and discuss the information in the fact box with the class. Ask the children to think about whether we should put animals in danger to help humans, using the prompt questions below to draw out further responses. You can use slide seven to record their thoughts.

## PROMPT QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be a hero?
- Do animals choose to help humans?
- Do you think Mandy wants to do this job?
- How might Mandy feel as she heads off into the minefield?
- Should the trainers send Mandy into the minefield when they know she would not survive an explosion?

## WHAT DOES THE RSPCA THINK ABOUT ANIMALS?

- Humans have responsibilities towards all animals
- Humans should make sure the needs of animals are always met
- All animals have feelings, emotions and can feel pain
- Animals are intelligent and can think for themselves
- All animals in experiments that cause pain, suffering or distress, should be replaced by humane alternatives

A purple hand icon with fingers spread, used as a background for the slide number text.

**SLIDE  
4-7**

# Animal heroes?

## TASK

Show **Archie and Woody's Fire Investigation Adventure** animation, inspired by real fire dogs from Cornwall.

Encourage the class to think about what it would be like if Archie or Mandy's needs were not met. Show slide 8 and read through the statements for each animal. Ask the class to suggest how their work might be negatively affected if their needs were not met and record their thoughts under the images of Archie and Mandy.

Ask the class to think about the similar needs of Archie and Mandy. Explain that both are intelligent social mammals, learn quickly, bond closely with humans, are sociable with their own species, don't cope on their own, and may well suffer in the occupations we have given them. Explain that the people training and looking after Archie and Mandy do everything they can to make sure they are healthy and happy, and that all their welfare needs are met.

Split the class into groups and ask them to imagine that they can present a 'bravest hero' award to an animal. They can choose to focus on one of the animals in the images on slides four and five. After a few minutes, each group should give a brief explanation about why they have made their chosen animal a hero.



## PROMPT QUESTIONS

- Do you think animals should be put in dangerous situations?
- How might Archie feel when he is investigating the causes of a house fire?
- Do you think Archie and Mandy know that they are heroes?
- Does it make a difference that Mandy didn't have an owner before becoming a hero rat?

SLIDE  
8

SLIDE  
4-5

# Animal heroes?

## CLASS DISCUSSION: COMPASSION

**10-20  
MINS**

Ask children to arrange themselves into a thinking ring. Remind children to listen respectfully to each other, without interruption and to build on the ideas and questions. There isn't necessarily a right or wrong answer, and people may have differing opinions.

### KICK OFF QUESTION

- What does it mean to do what is right?

### PROMPT QUESTIONS

- When do we choose what animals should do?
- Should animals be used to help in dangerous situations?
- When is it right for animals to work for humans?
- How can we ensure that humans meet the needs of 'animal heroes'?
- How do we know whether animals have feelings?
- Can animals be responsible for humans?

## SESSION SUMMARY

**5  
MINS**

Invite the pupils to revisit their initial responses recorded on slide two. Ask each pupil to think of a thought or question from the session that they would like to explore further, or was something new they have discovered today. Encourage pupils to share these with the rest of the class and record them under their initial ideas from the start of the lesson. By saving the PDF, you can return to these thoughts in another session.

**SLIDE  
2**

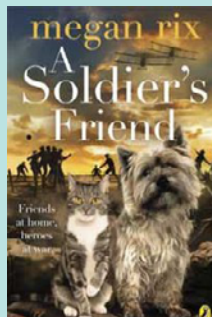
# Animal heroes?

## EXTENSION RESOURCES

To take the learning from this discovery session further, you could explore our suggested extension activities.

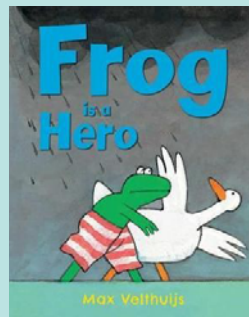
### Books

© Megan Rix 2014



**A Soldier's Friend**  
by Megan Rix

© Foundation Max Velthuis 1995



**Frog is a Hero**  
by Max Velthuis

### Online Resources

- Explore more real-life animal heroes by watching the RSPCA's **'Four-legged heroes'**
- Research the roles that other animals have played in helping humans, for example those who served their country in war using information found on the **RSPCA website** and **animalsinwar.org.uk**

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## ALTERNATIVE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT PUPILS WITH SEND

The activities below are suggestions to help you adapt the Animal Heroes activities to support your pupils' needs.

### TASK (PAGE FIVE)

After watching Archie and Woody's Fire Investigation Adventure, show this **Canine Partners Video** to see the kinds of jobs the dogs at Canine Partners do. If you have time, you could also show **Amazing Dogs** (up to two minutes three seconds) to see how the trainers put a focus on the puppies being cared for during training.

Ask the pupils, in the clips they have watched, what did they see that showed the animals were being cared for and their needs met? Why is this important?

Ask pupils to design a certificate to give to Archie or Mandy and consider what should be written on it. Pupils can design their certificate or alternatively you could use a template. Provide pupils with key phrases for support.





# Animal heroes?

## WHAT NEXT?

If this is your first Discovery activity, pick another stimulating activity to complete with your pupils.

If you've already completed at least two Discovery activities, choose an Advocacy activity that will provide your pupils with an entry for the Compassionate Class competition.

# Advocacy activities

**IF YOU LIKED THE 'ANIMAL HEROES' DISCOVERY ACTIVITY, WHY NOT TRY THESE ACTIVITIES**



## JOB FOR A TOP DOG

**Create a job description inviting animals to join the police force. How would you persuade the animals that all of their needs will be met? What might the benefits be, and what would you pay them in?**

- Challenge pupils to create an adventure story, comic strip or film which describes how a service animal becomes a hero.

## WHEN I RULE THE WORLD

**In groups, children imagine they are in charge of caring for all the animals in the world. Challenge them to discuss and design an expanded set of rules for animal welfare.**

- Design posters, banners or digital resources using creative design ideas to attract attention, hold an assembly, or write an article for the school website or newsletter which explain the children's animal welfare rules
- Discuss where to display the information about the animals' needs to inform the wider community, e.g. website, playground, school reception, library
- Present the information at a school council meeting or in an assembly. Meet with the headteacher to discuss if the rules could be displayed on the school website or be part of the school's safeguarding policy (suitable for older pupils)

