



**Class Pets  
Survival School  
by Frank Asch  
Teacher's Guide**

# **CLASS PETS: SURVIVAL SCHOOL**

By Frank Asch

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## Teacher's Guide

This guide will give you chapter by chapter suggestions for using this story as part of your curriculum. There are vocabulary and writing activities for each chapter as well as comprehension questions. The answers are provided for you.

## **Chapter One**

The students in Miss Clark's class are going wild as the new class pet, Dexter the gerbil, is running around the room. Meanwhile, Jake and Molly, the mice who live in the walls of the school, are watching the chaos from their hidden places. At the end of the chapter, Dexter goes inside the school walls and encounters Jake and Molly.

## Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Peephole: a hole, or crevice, through which one may peep without being discovered

Chaos: a condition or place of great disorder or confusion

Sheen: glistening brightness

## Comprehension Questions

1. Where did Miss Clark buy the new class pet? She bought it at Pretty Pets.
2. How do Jake and Molly watch what's happening in the classroom? They look through a peephole.
3. How did Dexter escape the classroom? He left through a hole behind the bookcase.

## Talking Points/ Writing Prompts

1. Do your students think that Miss Clark is a mean teacher? If they read carefully, they may pick up the clues that she is normally composed and calm and that this chapter's yelling is an anomaly. Ask them to describe what they think she is usually like to see if they pick up on the hints.
2. Students may enjoy drawing a picture of the scene that is described. Which words and phrases give them the best idea of what is going on? Have them talk about how writers create vivid scenes and ask them if they think this writer has done a good job in this chapter. Then ask them to write a vivid description of what your class-

room is like so that someone who isn't there could picture it. Finally, have them choose a newspaper photo and write a detailed description of it.

3. Some kids in the class are taking this opportunity to "make mischief." What do your students think they might be doing?

4. Ask your students what it means when Jake thinks, "I know fierce and mean. And you're about as fierce and mean as a candy cane!"

Learning Standards: creating graphics representations, writing descriptions

## **Chapter Two**

As Dexter talks to Molly and Jake they all realize that Dexter is unprepared to live in the outside world. Molly declares that Survival School is in session and that she and Jake will show Dexter what he needs to know in order to get along on his own.

### **Vocabulary Builders**

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Wistful: full of wishful yearning

Grub: slang for food

Awkward: clumsy

### **Comprehension Questions**

1. Why hasn't Dexter tasted cheese? He's only eaten gerbil food.

2. Why does Molly start Survival School? She wants to teach Dexter how to live outside of his cage in the real world.

3. What is the first lesson going to be about? The first lesson is about drinking water.

### **Talking Points/Writing Prompts**

1. Ask students to tell why they think Molly wants to be Dexter's teacher. There are some clues in the text that they can find. The story says that Molly's idol is Miss Clark and then she pictures herself as a teacher. Ask students to talk about whether they'd want to be teachers and what they might want to teach. They can write essays about their thoughts about their future.

2. Students can check the Help Wanted ads to find any that seek teachers. What are the qualities the employers are looking for? Have students write similar Help Wanted teacher ads, highlighting the qualities they think make a good teacher.

3. Have students talk about what they think they would teach a new student who just landed in your class.

Learning Standards: locating information, evaluating careers

### **Chapter Three**

The first lesson Dexter needs to learn is how to drink by patiently waiting for droplets of water to come his way and to catch them without getting wet. Next, it's off to get the cheese from the mousetrap without getting caught but then the worst happens.

#### **Vocabulary Builders**

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Collided: to come together with great impact

Sopping: thoroughly soaked

Savored: to taste or smell with pleasure

#### **Comprehension Questions**

1. Was it easy for Dexter to learn how to drink? No, he got wet while trying.
2. Why it is important to stay dry while drinking water? Because if they get wet, they could get sick.
3. Who is Mr. Hobbs? He is the janitor.

#### **Talking Points/Writing Prompts**

1. In order to teach Dexter, Molly and Jake tell him to pay attention and then they show him how things are done. What do your students think is the best way for them to learn something? Do they like to be shown how to do something or do they prefer to follow instructions for themselves. It may be interesting to allow time for a discussion about learning styles and to assess what students know about their own. Finally, ask them to write a list of the best ways to learn in school. What should they do if they want to do a good job in school? If the number one item is "Pay Attention," what are the other items on the list of learning tips for school?
2. The mice tell Dexter all about the requirements of the job of janitor. Have them skim the Help Wanted ads in the newspaper to find any similar jobs.
3. At the end of the chapter, the mousetrap has just been sprung. What do your students predict will happen next?

Learning Standards: creating lists, predicting

## Chapter Four

Dexter has just been trapped in the mousetrap and now Molly and Jake are trying to release him. Sadly, they fail in their efforts and end up trapped with him. Molly feels responsible because she is the teacher and should have warned him.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Composure: a calm state of mind

Budge: move

Winced: to shrink involuntarily, as in pain

Thermostats: a device that responds to change in temperature

Furnace: an enclosure in which energy is converted to heat

### Comprehension Questions

1. What happened when Molly tried to free Dexter and Jake from the mousetrap? They all three got trapped.
2. What does Mr. Hobbs do first? He checks the thermostats.
3. What is Molly's plan to get out of the mousetrap? She wants them all to play dead.

### Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. When Jake, Molly and Dexter all work together they are able to move the bar of the mousetrap. Talk with your students about the value of good teamwork and about what it takes to be a good team member. Have them write about a time when they worked or played with others with a good result.
2. Mr. Hobbs does the same things in the same order each day. What do your students do each day in the morning? Have them write about their morning routine.

Learning Standards: understanding the role of group members, organizing information

## **Chapter Five**

The animals are all caught in the trap and about to be disposed of by the school janitor. They plan to pretend to be dead and then to escape when he least expects it. The plan goes awry when the janitor figures out what they are up to just as he flushed Jake and Dexter down the toilet and Molly gets away. The chapter ends with Jake and Dexter spinning around as the toilet flushes.

### **Vocabulary Builders**

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Clinched: to fasten together

Doomed: inevitable destruction

Descended: to move from higher to lower place

Impersonate: to mimic the appearance, voice or character of

### **Comprehension Questions**

1. What is the tongue trick? It's sticking out your tongue so that you look dead.
2. Where does Mr. Hobbs try to throw the three rodents? He tries to throw them into the toilet but Molly hit the floor instead.
3. How did Ralph survive fourteen flushings? He had a secret.

### **Talking Points/Writing Prompts**

1. Dexter, Molly and Jake were really frightened. Ask students to brainstorm a list of synonyms for the word frightened. Then ask them to talk about and write about a time when they were frightened and to tell how they coped with the fear. Can they find something frightening in the newspaper? What do they think is the best way to handle fear?
2. What do your students think is going to happen to Jake and Dexter? Have them make predictions and then to write the first paragraph of the next chapter. Jake said that his uncle had a survival secret. What do they think that might be?

Learning Standards: brainstorming, writing paragraphs

## **Chapter Six**

Dexter and Jake sloshed through the plumbing and into the sewer and survived. Now Jake realizes that he has to take the responsibility of teaching Dexter what he needs to know. Meanwhile, Molly is running from Mr. Hobbs, the janitor and he has trapped her.

## Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Engulfed: surrounded

Waterlogged: soaked with water

Rodents: mammals of the order Rodentia such as mice or rats

Loomed: to come into view

Sinister: suggesting evil

## Comprehension Questions

1. Where did Jake and Dexter end up after they were flushed? They ended up in the sewer.
2. Does Jake really have an uncle Ralph? No, he made him up.
3. Why is Mr. Hobbs smiling at the end of the chapter? He has an idea.

## Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. Mr. Asch, the author, uses some terrific techniques to describe things. For example, in this sentence, "The water spun them so fast, like a ballerina, or a high-speed drill," he compares the spinning water to other things that spin quickly. Ask students to find another good comparison sentence in this chapter. (Further along in the chapter, he writes, 'The hockey stick came down like a bolt of lightning,' and 'Mr. Hobbs' pockmarked face loomed above her like some sinister moon in a horror movie.'

Explain this writing technique with your students and then ask them to write similar comparisons. They can start by completing these sentences

The boy ran as fast as...

The machine made a high-pitched squeal like a...

The dog smelled as bad as

2. Ask students why they think that Jake made up the story about Uncle Ralph. He lied to Dexter. Was that the right thing to do? Do your students believe that it is okay to lie if it's for a good cause like making someone feel less afraid?

Learning Standards: understanding similes, making justifications

## Chapter Seven

Jake and Dexter are in the sewer and they have encountered some nasty sewer rats.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Debris: scattered remains of something broken

Bask: to expose oneself to pleasant warmth

Severed: cut off

Galvanized: to arouse to awareness or action

### Comprehension Questions

1. Who is standing in the exit of the sewer? Sewer rats are there.
2. What do the rats want? They want to eat Jake and Dexter?
3. How do Jake and Dexter get away? Jake distracts the rats by calling out about another pack of rats approaching.

### Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. This chapter contains several compound words so it may be a good idea to have your students skim the chapter to locate them. Some of those are:

workbench

downstream

sunlight

Have the students find the two words that make up each compound word in order to define each of the words and to use it in a sentence.

2. Jake can't beat the rats using strength because he is smaller than they are so he tricks them in order to get away. Ask your students to read this passage carefully and to write a description of the trick that Jake used on the rats. This will enable you to make sure that the students understand how Jake outsmarted the rats.

Learning Standards: understanding compound words, writing descriptions

## Chapter Eight

Mr. Hobbs trapped Molly and has her in a bucket. Meanwhile, the sewer rats are after Dexter and Jake again.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Runts: an undersized animal

Retort: to reply or answer

Resounding: filled with sound

Procession: the moving along in an orderly manner

### Comprehension Questions

1. Why doesn't Molly care so much about what happens to her? She's upset that her brother and Dexter are gone.
2. How does Molly know she's near the furnace? She feels the heat from the flames.
3. How do Jake and Dexter escape the rats? They run under the hot dog cart.

### Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. This chapter affords you the opportunity to teach a lesson about homonyms, synonyms and antonyms.

There are several words in this chapter that have homonyms. Some of those are grate (great), one (won), board (bored), do (due), wood (would), here (hear), heard (herd), to (two, too), and wait (weight).

Students can skim the chapter, identifying the words with homonyms (words which sound the same but mean different things), writing the homonyms and then using each in a sentence.

They can circle any five words and write the antonyms for those.

Finally, each of these words can be found in this chapter. Have students write an antonym (opposite) for each and use each in a sentence.

hard

big

desperate

dim

slowly

leader

2. Which of the characters in this chapter do your students think are brave? Have them write a character sketch of the bravest character and to give details of how that bravery is shown. Can they also find someone who is brave in the newspaper? Can they think of times when they had to be brave?

Learning Standards: understanding homonyms, synonyms and antonyms

## **Chapter Nine**

Jake and Dexter get out of the sewer, clean themselves off and run for a while under the hot dog cart until they end up at the deli where Jake used to live. Molly, meanwhile, remains with Mr. Hobbs who has just learned that a gerbil is on the loose.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Dank: disagreeably damp

Confines: to keep within bounds

Giddy: having a lighthearted feeling

Huffed: to puff or blow in anger

Boasted: bragged

### Comprehension Questions

1. What is Deli Dan's? It's where Jake grew up.
2. Where does Mr. Hobbs put Molly? He puts her in an aquarium.
3. Why did Mr. Hobbs clean the aquarium? He cleaned it so he could get a good look at Molly.

### Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. In this chapter we meet Mrs. Wiser, the school principal. She has lots of issues to deal with – an escaped class pet, school lighting and keeping the parents happy. What do your students think is the most important job of the school principal? What qualities make a good principal? Have students check the newspaper Help Wanted ads to see how they are written and then they can write one seeking a principal.
2. The chapter ends with Mr. Hobbs leaning forward. What do your students predict that he will do next? Have them write the beginning of chapter ten as they think it might happen.

Learning Standards: analyzing character traits, writing for different purposes

## Chapter Ten

While Molly and Mr. Hobbs are becoming friends, Jake and Dexter are greeting friends at the deli and Jake has just seen his mother.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Transformation: a change

Aroma: a pleasant odor

### Comprehension Questions

1. Did Mr. Hobbs ever have a pet? He had a dog when he was a kid.
2. What did Mr. Hobbs feed Molly? He fed her some cheese from his lunch.
3. Why will Jake's mother be happy he lives in a school? She always wanted her kids to get an education.

### Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. In this chapter Mr. Hobbs fondly remembers his childhood pet, a dog. Do your students have pets? Invite them to talk about pets they've had and about how they felt about them. They may want to draw pictures and write stories about the pets they've had or the pets they've wanted. The relationship between people and their pets is a special one with lots of benefits and responsibilities. This may be a good time to talk about what goes into being a pet owner.
2. Uncle Louie uses a lot of words that have to do with sailing. Ask your students why this is so. (He once lived on a ship.) Then, have students imagine that rather than living on a ship, Uncle Louie had lived in a carpenter shop, a zoo, a department store, a fire station or an airport. How would his colorful expressions be different? Have students rewrite some of the expressions to fit the other environments. For example, "What brings you back to port?" might become "Why have you flown back in?" if Uncle Louie had come from an airport.

Learning Standards: understanding duties and responsibilities, using figurative language

## **Chapter Eleven**

Jake has reconnected with his family and they are filling him in on their plans to find a new place to live because of a mean cat. It turns out the cat is one that Jake had a run in with.

### **Vocabulary Builders**

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

**Kin:** relative

**Recounted:** told again

**Mauled:** to injure by beating

**Vengeance:** to punish in return for a wrong

**Lurks:** to lie in wait as in ambush

### **Comprehension Questions**

1. Why is Jake's family leaving the deli? They're leaving because of a monster cat.
2. Why is Big Gray mad at Jake? Jake bit him.
3. What do Momma and Poppa decide to do? They decide to go with Jake and Dexter.

### **Talking Points/Writing Prompts**

1. Jake realizes that the cat whom he bit is now harassing his family. Although he insists that biting was the only way out of that situation, he now thinks that maybe he should have handled it differently. Do your students think that violence is a good way to resolve a conflict? What would they do if they were Jake and a bully was picking on them? This may be a good opportunity to facilitate a discussion about bullying and how to handle it.
2. Your students may be able to find conflict happening in the comic strips. Have them find such a strip and to talk about ways in which the conflict could be resolved.

**Learning Standards:** solving problems, portraying positive characteristics

## **Chapter Twelve**

Mr. Hobbs is getting to know and like Molly while Jake and Dexter discuss why they have to move back to the school.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Thrust: to push quickly

Dejected: to lower the spirits

Sulk: to be withdrawn and quiet

### Comprehension Questions

1. Did Molly like being in the girl's hands? Yes, the hands were soft and warm and smelled good.
2. Had Mr. Hobbs held a gerbil before? No, he didn't think so.
3. Why does Jake think Dexter should go back to living in a cage? Jake doesn't think Dexter knows enough to survive in the world.

### Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. Ava says that she is good with pets. What kind of a person makes a good pet owner? Would your students want to own a pet like a gerbil? Do they know what it takes to care for a rodent? Have them use the Pets for Sale or Adoption ads in the Classified section and to choose one they would like to have. They can write a letter to the animal telling why they'd be great owners.
2. Why do your students think that Mr. Hobbs asked Ava her name? Do they think that he is usually this friendly? Why? What are the story clues that tell the reader what Mr. Hobbs is like?

Learning Standards: writing letters, locating specific information

## **Chapter Thirteen**

Jake is tangling with his old enemy, Big Gray the cat.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Ambush: the act of lying in wait to attack

Coy: flirtatiously shy

Malice: a desire to harm others

### Comprehension Questions

1. Where are the rodents planning to meet? They'll meet at the edge of the park.
2. What does Big Gray look like? He has matted fur that looks like the bark of a tree.
3. Did Jake get away from Big Gray? No, Jake is trapped at the bottom of the crate.

### Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. Baby Ben says that he can run "as fast as a cheetah." Talk about this writing technique with your students and allow them time to brainstorm ways to finish these descriptions using metaphors and similes.

As slow as

As bright as

As sticky as

As funny as

2. There is a vivid description of Big Gray, the cat. Ask students to read it carefully and to draw a detailed picture, based on what they read.

Learning Standards: using similes and metaphors, creating graphic representations, defining words

## Chapter Fourteen

Dexter and Jake are able to trick Big Gray and to get away safely. Now Jake's family is on their way through the park to the school.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Malevolent: having ill will

Leer: to look with a sidelong glance

Oblivion: the condition of being completely forgotten

Baffled: confused

### Comprehension Questions

1. What does Dexter tell Big Gray? He tells him that Jake has rat poison on his fur and that if Big Gray eats Jake, he'll die.

2. Why is Baby Ben upset? He thinks the cat ate Jake.
3. Where is the mouse family going? They're going to the school.

#### Talking Points/ Writing Prompts

1. This chapter includes many words that might be new to your students. You may want to ask them to circle any with which they are unfamiliar and then to define those. It may be fun to play "Dictionary" with the students writing their own zany definitions to the words and taking turns reading them aloud, along with the correct meaning so that other students can guess and identify the real meaning.
2. In this chapter, the mouse family is working together to help each other. This might be a good time to assign your students to write about how they family functions – how they help and support each other.

Learning Standards: recognizing words, understanding the role of families

### **Chapter Fifteen**

The mouse family and Dexter are hitching a ride back to school in Miss Clark's book bag.

#### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Plowing: to move with driving force

Enormous: very large

Arsenal: a collection of weapons

#### Comprehension Questions

1. What is Jake's shortcut to school? It's hitchhiking a ride in Miss Clark's backpack.
2. Who does Ava think Molly is? She thinks Molly is the lost class pet – Dexter.

#### Talking Points/ Writing Prompts

As Baby Ben crawls through the tall, wet grass of the jungle, he says that it's like "crashing through a jungle." This is a good illustration for readers about perspective. To a mouse, walking through grass is perceived as jungle-like. Assign your students to assume the perspective of one of the characters in this story and to write a reaction to their surroundings. What was it like for Jake to encounter Big Gray?

What did it look, feel and smell like inside the book bag from Momma's perspective? How about from the perspective of the book bag? What did it feel like to have a family of mice inside? Finally, have students choose a photo from the newspaper and to write about the photo from the perspective of an object in the picture.

Learning Standards: understanding perspective, writing for fluency

## **Chapter Sixteen**

Mr. Hobbs told Miss Clark that he had found Dexter but she discovered that it was a wild house mouse, Molly. Now she must tell her class that Dexter is dead.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Dispose: to get rid of

Dread: to be in terror of

### Comprehension Questions

1. What doesn't Miss Clark want to tell her students? She doesn't want to tell them that Dexter is dead or missing.
2. What is Mr. Hobbs' idea? He thinks that Miss Clark's class should keep Molly as a pet.
3. Why doesn't Miss Clark want Molly as class pet? She says that mice carry diseases.

### Talking Points/ Writing Prompts

1. Ask your students what evidence is there in this chapter that Miss Clark is a nice person and a good teacher? They should be able to assess that her sensitivity about telling her students about Dexter's demise is a sign of a nice person and a caring teacher. Also she says, "I just love what I do."
2. Ask students to predict what will happen next for each of these characters – Dexter, Jake, and Molly. At the end of this chapter, their fates are all unknown.

Learning Standards: using words in context, using evidence and reasoning

## Chapter Seventeen

While the students talk about their memories of Dexter, Dexter thinks about giving up the free life and returning to life as a class pet.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Spontaneous: arising from a natural inclination

Somber: gloomy or dark

### Comprehension Questions

1. How did the students react to Dexter's death? Some started crying.
2. What is Dexter thinking about? He's thinking about returning to the classroom cage.
3. What is Poppa's idea for Dexter? He suggests that Dexter spend days in the cage and nights with the mice.

### Talking Points/Writing Prompts

1. In this chapter the students talk about their memories and thoughts of Dexter when they think he is dead. This presents material for a unique writing activity. Have your students write obituaries about the gerbil, based on the information. They can check the obituary column in the newspaper to see how one is structured.
2. Dexter speaks a great deal in this chapter about family. The fact is that families come in all shapes and sizes. Talk with your students about the many faces of family. Some are those that people are born into while others are those that form from a bond of another sort. Families sometimes include mothers and fathers while some just have one or the other. Others may be formed by people who are not blood relatives but love each other just the same. Allow your students time to share their thoughts about the many types of families.

Learning Standards: exploring universal themes, understanding the human experience

## Chapter Eighteen

Dexter goes back to being a class pet. Mr. Hobbs lets Molly loose and she goes back to her family. The story ends happily.

### Vocabulary Builders

Ask students to define each of these words in context and to use each in a sentence. If they are unable to define them in context, suggest dictionary use. They should also identify the root word when possible.

Moisten: to make moist

Nuzzled: to rub or push gently

Knothole: a hole in a piece of lumber where a piece has come out

### Comprehension Questions

1. How did Molly get free? Mr. Hobbs let her go.
2. What was the happiest sight Molly ever saw? It was her family seated around her table.
3. What does Dexter decide to do? He goes back to his cage and stays in Molly's survival school.

### Talking Points/ Writing Prompts

1. The story ends happily with Molly, Jake and Dexter back where they truly belong. Invite your students to write one more chapter of this story, showing what happens next when Jake, Molly and their family meet up with Dexter at night when school is closed.
2. Have students practice writing alternate endings by choosing a comic strip from the newspaper and changing the last panel to a different outcome.

Learning Standards: plan, draft, revise and edit texts