



# Discovering Alabama

## Teacher's Guide

### Animal Friends Series

#### Suggested Curriculum Areas

Social Studies  
Life Science  
Civics

#### Suggested Grade Levels

4 – 12

#### Key Concepts

Animal Friends  
Humane Treatment  
Stewardship

#### Key Skills

Compassion  
Empathy  
Comprehension

#### Synopsis

The two-part series, “Animal Friends,” centers around the topic of domestic animal abuse in Alabama. The first episode, “Animal Friends,” examines research findings on animal capacities for feeling emotions and performing cognitive thought, and visits with several staff from animal welfare groups describing their encounters with the troubling realities of animal abuse and neglect in the state. “Animal Friends – Part II” presents additional assessment of the animal abuse problem, and includes visits with a number of organizations discussing various initiatives underway to help address the problem. (Caution: These videos involve images and content that might be disturbing to some. Prior to showing, students should be properly advised in case some prefer not to view.)



*Discovering Alabama* is a production of the **Alabama Museum of Natural History** in cooperation with **Alabama Public Television**. For a complete list of titles in the *Discovering Alabama* series, as well as information about ordering videos and accompanying Teacher's Guides, contact us at either: Discovering Alabama, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa AL 35487-0340; phone: 205-348-2039; fax: 205-348-4219; or email: [orders@discoveringalabama.org](mailto:orders@discoveringalabama.org). Also visit our website: [www.discoveringalabama.org](http://www.discoveringalabama.org).

This program was produced with support from the following organization:

*The Solon and Martha  
Dixon Foundation*

## Before Viewing

1 Ask your students if any of them have had an animal friend (of course, dogs and cats are the most common domestic pets but certainly there are many other kinds, from parakeets to hamsters. And some students might also have animal “friends” they like very much among the family’s farm animals.). Invite willing students to tell the class about their respective animal friends.

2 Conduct a class brainstorm to develop a list of needs that humans must provide for their animals in order to assure good care and treatment of the animals. Introduce the fact that sometimes animals are not given proper humane care; However, there are people and organizations in Alabama dedicated to helping provide for animal welfare.

## While Viewing

Have students note the caring people and dedicated animal welfare organizations featured in the video.

### Video Mystery Questions

“Animal Friends”: The video includes an interview with a Harvard biologist discussing the importance of animals to the ecological health of the world. Who is this biologist? (Answer: Dr. E.O. Wilson, a world-renowned ecologist and two-time Pulitzer Prize winning author who is also an Alabama native. Check out his famous book *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2006).

“Animal Friends – Part II”: What abusive commercial practice is mentioned as being in serious need of regulatory laws? (Answer: The careless breeding of dogs in commercial “puppy mills.” Consult with The Greater Birmingham Humane Society (<https://gbhs.org>) for information on the seriousness of this practice).

## After Viewing

Invite student discussion. Review the various animal welfare groups that were featured. (All websites are listed in Additional References and Resources.)

## Extensions

1 View other *Discovering Alabama* programs dealing with issues related to animal welfare and to the conservation of wildlife. Examples include “Animal Rescuers,” “Wildlife History,” “Red-Cockaded Woodpecker,” and “Whooping Cranes.”

2 Invite representatives from animal welfare groups to speak to the class about the work of their organizations.

## Philosophical Reflections

Philosophers, scientists, and theologians have debated the nature of animals for centuries. For example, in the seventeenth century, René Descartes espoused the popular view of the time that animals are unthinking creatures with no ability to reason or to intelligently communicate. Soon to follow, philosopher Jeremy Bentham, disagreed. Bentham famously impugned the moral failure of this popular view with the assertion, “the question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but Can they suffer?” Given the obvious evidence that, in fact, animals can suffer, Bentham’s 1780 treatise *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, was among the earliest published attempts to propose a moral basis for establishing laws prohibiting animal abuse. What do you think?

## Nature in Art

Invite students to take a photograph (or produce a drawing or painting) of their animal friend and bring it to class for sharing.

## Community Connections

- 1 Arrange a class project to provide volunteer assistance for an animal welfare group in your area.
- 2 Assign student groups to research different aspects of animal welfare in your area (numbers and kinds of abuse/neglect, available animal welfare groups/facilities, funding/financial challenges, public attitudes, educational needs, etc.). Compile findings in a report to the community.

## Additional References & Resources

### Websites

- Humane Society of the United States: <https://www.humanesociety.org>
- Walker Co. Humane & Adoption Center: <https://walkercounty.al.us/animal-shelter>
- Tuscaloosa Metro Shelter: <https://www.metroanimalshelter.org>
- Alabama Spay/Neuter clinic: <https://www.alspay.org>
- Greater Birmingham Humane Society: <https://gbhs.org>
- Kitty Kat Haven Rescue: <https://kittykathavenrescue.org>
- Gatos & Beans: <https://gatosandbeans.com>
- Big Dog Ranch & Rescue: <https://www.bdr.org/alabama>
- Tuscaloosa Spay & Neuter Incentive Program: <http://www.tsnip.org>
- Canine Compassion Fund: <http://www.caninecompassionfund.org>

- 2 x 2 Animal Rescue: <https://twobytworescue.com>
- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals: <https://www.aspc.org/>

## Parting Thoughts

*The “Animal Friends” episodes discuss the kinds of animal abuse and neglect that are generally recognized as being inhumane and that are typically encountered by animal welfare organizations. However, there are a number of other kinds of animal treatment that, while legally permissible, are insensitive to animals in ways that I feel border on being abusive. And please pardon my disparaging attitude toward the people who exhibit these insensitivities – their prevalence pains me.*

*Examples:*

1. *People who mutilate their animals, cutting off tails, trimming ears, etc., to create a desired “look.”*
2. *People who obtain an animal, often via expensive purchase, that is a rare breed, has a famous lineage, or projects a sophisticated image that the owner feels will enhance his or her own image and attract admiring attention.*
3. *People who obtain animals of certain breeds reputed to be ill-spirited and aggressive against strangers (and against other animals) and that serve as show-off items for the owner’s self-imagined sense of macho prowess.*
4. *People who own domestic animals and provide them food and water but rarely (or never) give them friendly attention – or perhaps worse, leave them in small pens or with only minimum, uncomfortable shelter.*
5. *People who obtain animals for pets but live in situations (cramped apartments, dangerous surroundings, inadequate means to provide care, etc.) that are unsuited and stressful to the animals.*
6. *People who train their animals (usually dogs) to strictly obey*

*every command so the owner can feel a self-inflating sense of dominance and control, especially when the owner can show off this power of control to impress others.*

7. *People who have little personal understanding of their animal and who are so little in touch with their animal’s sensibilities that they treat the animal haphazardly or roughly. Particularly irksome to me are the people who take their dog out on a leash and continually jerk the poor animal around and speak harshly to it.*

8. *People who view animals as “just animals” to be treated and used as humans prefer without genuine humane consideration of how animals may think or feel. (As noted in “Animal Friends,” this is a common mindset in much of Alabama. Beware of your own neighbors.)*

9. *Add additional examples that concern you here. (For example, people who are willing to pay a pretty price to purchase a pedigree but are unwilling to consider obtaining a needy animal from the local shelter or rescue facility.)*

10. *See the back panel of this Guide for a listing of more serious forms of abuse and what you can do to help stop the abuse.*

*Oh yeah, I almost forgot. There are also people who obtain certain breeds and deliberately train them or encourage them to be aggressive. People who do this to their “pet” deserve serious counseling (and perhaps the threat of jail). People who do this for purposes of the disgusting criminal activity of “dog fighting” should be put under the jail.*

Happy outings,

*Dr. Doug*





## Discovering *Alabama*

Activity/Information Sheet

Animal Friends Series

### STOP ANIMAL CRUELTY

#### What you can do to help stop animal abuse\*

Every state has laws prohibiting animal cruelty and all of them contain felony provisions. However, a law is only as good as its enforcement and that's why animals rely on you to protect them by reporting animal abuse.

##### Defining cruelty

Most reported animal cruelty comes in the form of neglect, with direct violence occurring less. Often times, it can be difficult to gauge whether or not you've witnessed animal cruelty – the following examples may help you categorize suspected cruelty you do see.

##### Neglect

Neglect, or a failure to provide basic needs for an animal, makes up the vast majority of cruelty cases that animal control officers respond to. Neglect often includes hoarding, lack of shelter or veterinary care, tethering and abandonment, as well as other forms of abuse.

##### Direct abuse

It can be very upsetting to see someone beating or physically attacking an

animal, but it's important not to turn away. It's crucial to involve law enforcement quickly, as violence toward animals is often part of a larger pattern of violence that can include people as well.

##### Reporting abuse

If you witness suspected cruelty to animals, call your local animal control agency as soon as possible or dial 9-1-1 if you're unfamiliar with local organizations. If you make a report of alleged animal cruelty, the responding agency is required to investigate.

If your area lacks the proper animal welfare agency and your local authorities are not equipped to deal with animal cruelty cases, you can also contact us.

Be sure to document the case as well as you can with dates, times, specific details and, if possible, footage and photographs from a cell phone. All of these things can help appropriate agencies during any investigation they may do of the suspected cruelty.

##### Hoarding

Hoarding behavior often victimizes animals. Sufferers of a hoarding disorder may impose severe neglect on animals by housing far more than they are able to adequately take care of. Contact your local animal control agency if you find out about animal hoarding. Some animal hoarding situations can be more difficult than others to solve.

##### Lack of veterinary care

Untreated wounds are a red flag that demand immediate attention; emaciation, scabs and hair loss can also be a sign of untreated diseases. If you can, alert the owner to the animal's condition and alert local authorities of suspected neglect as soon as possible.

##### Inadequate shelter

In extreme heat or cold, temperatures can be deadly. It can seem daunting or unnecessary to report neglect for inadequate sheltering, but conditions can change quickly, causing suffering or even death of the animal. Contact a local animal control agency immediately if you see an animal in inadequate shelter

and document the incident with a cell phone camera if possible.

##### Abandonment

Animals die every year when people move out of their residences and simply leave the animals behind. Sometimes an abandoned dog's barking or cat's howling can alert the neighbors, but it's wise to keep an eye on a recently vacated home, especially if the former residents moved suddenly. Companion animals kept in cages or tanks are often overlooked upon a resident's sudden passing and may suffer neglect as well. If you find or know of abandoned animals, contact your local animal control agency immediately.

##### Beating and physical abuse

If you witness direct physical violence to an animal, report the incident immediately to authorities. If you decide to intervene in any way, use your best judgment and do not become physically involved in the situation; remember, even well-intentioned actions could compromise the process of investigation into suspected abuse.

Animal fighting and organized cruelty  
Organized cruelty, such as dogfighting, cockfighting, and other bloodsports, is illegal in all 50 states and is linked to other criminal activities such as human violence, gambling and drug distribution. If you hear about or witness events like these, immediately report them to the local authorities and the HSUS.

In many cases, you may be the only chance an animal has at escaping cruelty or neglect.

\* THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES  
1255 23rd St. NW, Suite 450  
Washington, DC 20037

<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/report-animal-cruelty>