

ISSUE 25

Pet-people

Did you know that, over time, our pets begin to resemble us? Not just in terms of behavior and attitude, but even in the way they look. If you don't believe me, try this simple experiment. Go someplace where a lot of dogs are allowed to wander around by themselves, like a park. Then try to match the animals with their owners. You'll be surprised at how many you will be able to identify.

What is your favorite kind of pet? Why?

- (1) Dogs
- (2) Cats
- (3) Mice
- (4) Reptiles
- (5) Birds
- (6) Other



Sample Answers

(A) The world *breaks down* into Cat People and Dog People, I guess. I'm a Dog Man. Dogs are always friendly and eager to please; cats are solitary and independent, except for the few times when they want attention. It's easy to train dogs; cats are bright but too *contrary* to get educated easily. In addition, dogs have traditionally filled useful functions in human households, as herders, hunters, protectors, and burglar alarms, while cats are always merely decorative — have you ever heard of a “watch cat”?

(B) Snakes fascinate me, the bigger the better. All of the things that most people think are true about snakes are actually quite false. They are not *slimy* at all; they are very cool and dry. Once they become used to being handled, they are very *docile*. And they are quite easy to take care of; due to their low metabolism, they can go for weeks without eating. And, though they are not as *obvious* as most pets, they truly do show affection to the humans who care for them.

Speak Your Mind

1. Do you like pets? Why or why not?
2. Why are more and more people becoming pet owners?
3. How much do pets cost, *in your estimation*? Is that too much?
4. If you were leaving on vacation, what would you do with your pets? Would you leave them at home, take them with you, or do something else with them?
5. Do you think people with pets make good neighbors?
6. Do you think that pets are better off than some people? Explain your opinion.

→ **break down** : divide → **contrary** : opposite in nature or character

→ **slimy** : covered with a thick wet unpleasant substance

→ **docile** : well-behaved, quiet, and easy to control

→ **obvious** : easily seen or understood; evident → **in one's estimation** : in one's opinion

Speak Your Mind Helpers

1. Do you like pets? Why or why not?

(A)

I don't see what all the *fuss* about pets is about. The way some people *fawn* over stupid animals makes me sick — they treat them with more affection than they do their own children. Perhaps taking in a *stray* dog or cat for companionship is understandable, but anyone who spends a small fortune on a dumb animal could obviously use that money for a far better purpose. I guess pets are God's way of telling any culture that it has just too much money!

(B)

I remember the first cat I got. I was nine, and the cat was a birthday present. We *bonded* immediately. I don't care what their *detractors* say, cats are actually very warm, caring creatures, capable of great love and companionship for their owners. Every day, the cat would lie in my lap while I drew pictures or did my homework. When I rubbed his belly (which was often), he would *purr* and purr in contentment. We spent many years together, in good times and bad, and that cat was always a faithful, devoted friend. Since then I have had many other cats and cannot imagine a happy life without one.

2. Why are more and more people becoming pet owners?

(A)

It is all part of Western cultural *imperialism* and status-seeking. Thirty years ago, almost no one had a pet cat or dog, although farmers may have had animals around to hunt mice or help with the chores. But the change in attitude came upon us all at once, and soon every *affluent* young urban family felt the need to *flaunt* its new wealth. All of a sudden, women with small lap dogs on the subway became a common sight, and well-groomed packs of pink-eared poodles began to *roam* freely in every *well-heeled* neighborhood.

(B)

People need dependable companionship, especially in the lonely city. Pets fill this need. Families may break up through divorce or just the process of aging; kids go off to college, get married, and move away from home; old friends are transferred elsewhere or gain new interests and comrades. But one's pet stays close forever.

3. How much do pets cost, in your estimation? Is that too much?

(A)

Some of them cost almost a week's pay to buy. And that's just *for starters*. They still need *shots* and bedding. We have to feed them several times a day and take them to a *veterinarian* when they get sick. And they live better, more comfortable lives than we do. It is we who work on their behalf, not *the other way around*, so I guess they are the masters and we the servants after all.

(B)

One does not have to spend a lot of money to get a nice pet. Usually, a neighbor's pet has just had puppies or kittens that need a good home. The money spent to take care of them is also *negligible*; left-over kitchen *scraps* will often be sufficient and healthy too. So, for an extremely small investment, we can get a lifetime of love and companionship.

4. If you were leaving on vacation, what would you do with your pets? Would you leave them at home, take them with you, or do something else with them?

(A)

When I'm going away, I always take my cat with me. By now, she's a *seasoned* traveler who's very familiar with the *routine*. A little preparation in advance is all that's needed: making sure that the proper vaccinations are *administered* and the correct paperwork filled out; a nice, comfortable pet carrier; and sufficient food and water to get to the destination.

(B)

If I can't find a neighbor or friend who is willing to help out while I'm gone, I just leave my pets at a *kennel*. That way I know they are being properly fed, exercised, and taken care of, and I don't have to worry about them until I get back.

Speak Your Mind Helpers

5. Do you think people with pets make good neighbors?

(A)

I hate it when the neighbor's cat starts *howling* in the middle of the night. The first time, I *panicked* and thought it was an infant in *distress*. But now that I know it's just a frustrated pet looking for a *one-night stand*, I just get irritated because I can't sleep. I wish the neighbor would just put the cat out for the night, so both the animal and I could have a good night *for once*.

(B)

The worst *plague* brought on by pet owners is their carelessness in cleaning up after their *wards*. All the streets in my neighborhood are dotted with little mounds of *excrement*, *Fido's* smelly *calling cards*. They are *unsightly* and hard to keep from stepping on, and they attract flies, which then spread their diseases to my house. Really, it wouldn't take more than a few seconds for the owners to take care of the problem, but they seem to prefer to pretend that there is no problem.

→ **howl** : make a loud, long, mournful cry → **panic** : have a sudden strong feeling of fear or worry and be unable to think clearly or calmly as a result → **distress** : feeling of being extremely worried and upset

→ **one-night stand** : short, impersonal relationship → **for once** : on this occasion only, as an exception

→ **plague** : cause of annoyance; nuisance → **wards** : pets → **excrement** : solid biological waste

→ **fido** : pet dog → **calling card** : evidence that (sb/sth) has been to a place → **unsightly** : ugly

6. Do you think that pets are better off than some people? Explain your opinion.

M : Look at that puppy!

F : Oh, how cute! I wish we had one like that.

M : It's a shame how we treat our pets better than we treat other people.

F : How can you say that?

M : Well, it's true, isn't it? Just think about how many people are starving or don't have any place to live. And yet that dog is treated like *royalty*.

F : Yes, you're right. But I still wish we had a dog like that one!

M : OK, we'll get one. But I hope you treat ours better than that one.

F : It looks happy and well-fed to me. You were just complaining about how we treat dogs better than we treat people.

M : But that haircut! The dyed hair and the costume! I don't think any self-respecting dog would want to look like that.

F : But it's so cute!

M : That dog would be much better off living in the natural state instead of looking like a clown.

F : I bet his owners love him very much. That's why they dress him like that. The sweater keeps him warm, and he needs to have his hair *trimmed* from time to time. What's wrong with that?

M : What about the blue tail and the pink ears?

F : Dyeing his hair isn't any different than dyeing mine, to look better. Don't you think I look good with my hair done this way?

M : Ummmmmmmmmmmm.
Yeah. Of course I like it.

F : Then it's exactly the same thing, isn't it?

M : OK, you win. But I hope you'll agree that there is still something wrong with a world that spends so much time *pampering* a puppy and can't even bother meeting the minimum needs of its people.

