

of love and discipline without which we stay children and never grow up. I give you warning, Senior pupils and all the rest of you, that we are not going to let this school become a pack of monkeys. God bless you.



PETS AND ZOOS

Assembly 54. Wednesday April 2nd 2003

How many of you have animals as pets at home – have you? Hands up! Have you a pet? A dog, cat, or a fish, or a bird? We have a nice fish tank in the office here. Some people have guard dogs but I notice that most of these dogs are asleep most of the day because they consider themselves on duty at night. My father was mad about animals and we always had some.

Many people love animals when they are babies. The little dog – the puppy – the little cat – the kitten – is very popular. People go “Ahhhhhh! Isn’t it sweet?” Sometimes, people give baby animals as presents and, for a short time, they are cuddled and loved. And then they get bigger – and some of them get very big – and they need feeding, and they need their coats brushing and dogs need to be taken for nice walks, and then they fall ill – and it is a lot of responsibility. If you want to go away on holiday, what do you do with your pets if there is no one left behind who can care for them? That is when some pets get neglected or thrown out onto the streets. There is a car sticker in the UK to stop people buying puppies as presents at Christmas. It says, “A dog is for life. Not just for Christmas.” Having a pet is a big responsibility that needs to be carefully thought about.

Some people like to have exotic pets. My father had a woolly monkey before I was born but it died before the war. Now we know much more about monkeys because their behaviour has

been studied. We know that it is not good to have them as pets because they need to live in groups. Now some animals are getting very low in number, very rare. Remember that word – ‘rare’. A rare animal is one that is getting so low in number that it could die out altogether. It is especially important not to buy babies of rare animals because the only way the hunters can get a baby is to shoot the mother. In particular, baby chimpanzees can bring a high price – in money – but the highest price of all has been paid by the mother who had to die. If you see beautiful birds or wild animals on sale, please do not buy them, if they are rare. Remember the slogan, “When the buying stops, the killing can stop too.” Remember? (*repeat*) We want the babies of rare animals and birds and fish to be brought up in the wild so that they can act naturally and, one day, have babies of their own and so help to increase the numbers..

If we want to see rare animals, we can see them on the television or in zoos. Most zoos are very good because, if they are not, people make a big fuss because they care about the animals there. I stayed with a friend next door to a zoo when I went to Malawi, Africa - a very poor country. The zoo had a lion and I used to lie in bed and hear it roaring. It sounded very near. I thought I better check that it was in a nice, strong cage and so I went to see it. The nice African manager, said, “The lion’s friend died and I know I should not keep a lion on his own but some of the visitors to the zoo see him and say, “Oh, what a big dog!” At that time, Malawi did not have television and many of the people did not know what a lion looked like. So that lion was doing a very good job, sitting around and roaring and being a lion, even though he was very lonely. Nowadays we know it is best to keep the big cats with lots of others in lots of space. I discovered that that African zoo manager had been trained in Britain with Gerald Durrell, a famous zoo keeper who wrote the book ‘My family and other animals’. It is a very funny book and has been a set book for O level. If you see a copy, buy it.

You and I live in a very interesting world with lots of creatures in it. We are learning more and more about them and, as we do so, we learn more about ourselves. We are distant relatives of the animals and we can learn FROM them as we learn ABOUT them. God bless you.



DOGS WITH JOBS

Assembly 56 – Thursday April 3rd 2003

Some of us are looking at the school rules and wondering if they need to be updated. There are some school rules in your diaries, some in your classrooms and at least one form has made up their own rules about the behaviour they want in *their* classroom. We would very much like a copy of that, please 4B, and to know the comments and suggestions of all of you about improvements to our rules.

Some of you are forgetting the rule about ‘Sitting down to eat’ OR maybe you think that packets of crisps aren’t food so don’t count. Yesterday, I stopped two boys walking up and down the stairs with open packets of crisps. If someone had bumped into them and made them drop the packets, the crisps would have gone all over the stairs in thousands of tiny pieces. Either eat in your classrooms or in the canteen – do not walk around eating and drinking. It’s not good for your digestion, either.

My last talk this week on animals will be about working animals, that is, animals who do a useful job. Elephants, horses, oxen, donkeys – all can work for us but, in some cultures, including mine, for many years, people have used the fact that dogs love being useful and love being praised – and so can be trained to do all sorts of jobs. Where there are lots of sheep, special sheepdogs are used for gathering them and moving them

to places where the farmer needs them. In some hilly parts of the UK, sheep feed off the grass over miles and miles of hills. They would be impossible to gather without dogs. Because of television, we can watch how these dogs work, because they run for miles and different cameras follow them. The only way the shepherd can communicate with them is by whistles – and every different kind of whistle means a different order – turn left, turn right, stop and drop, move on slowly and so forth. A hundred men could not do what two good sheepdogs can do.

Then there are Guidedogs for the Blind – have you seen how they work? They are trained and then the blind person is trained with them for a time because they have to work as a team and understand each other. The Guidedog wears a special harness with a handle that the blind person holds. The dog will go along the side of the road and stop at the crossings and wait for the traffic – until it is safe to cross. The dog quickly gets to know the shops and homes that their master or mistress likes to visit. Many blind people who have dogs cannot imagine life without one. Many shops have a notice, ‘NO DOGS ALLOWED – except guide dogs’ because they are very well-behaved. A very important member of the British Government, David Blunkett, our Home Secretary, is blind and his dog goes into Parliament with him and lies down in the House of Commons at his feet. There are also working dogs for deaf people. When the telephone rings or the doorbell rings, the deaf person cannot hear, so the dog goes to them and communicates what is happening.

But the most frequent jobs that dogs do is to be guard dogs. A real guard dog is specially trained and the man or woman who is going to work with him is trained also. They are a team. The handler has to know how to give the orders and the dog must know what to do. A guard and his guard dog are a team who are very expensive to hire because they do a good job. Many thieves and other criminals who are not afraid of people, are afraid of a dog. I cannot understand why, here in Bangladesh, someone has