

# Philosophy for Children Alberta



Using  
**Collaborative Inquiry**  
to build  
**Critical Thinking Skills**  
and  
**Caring Communities**

## Pigeon Wants a Puppy by Mo Willems

### Summary

Pigeon thinks that a puppy is the perfect pet, but Pigeon's mind is quickly changed when the puppy arrives. Perhaps a walrus would be better?

### Themes:

*Preferences and Happiness, Needing and Wanting, The Nature of a Pet, What Should be a Pet?*

### Guidelines for Discussion:

One of the central philosophical issues in *Pigeon Wants a Puppy* is that of informed and uninformed preferences and the relation these have to happiness. An uninformed preference, as the name suggests, is the having of a desire without also having all, or even some, of the (important) information about the thing desired. The link that uninformed preferences have to (un)happiness is highlighted not only by Pigeon's claim that without a puppy Pigeon won't be happy, but also by the very clear dislike that Pigeon expresses when Pigeon finally gets the puppy. This first set of questions is meant to help your child think about what preferences he or she has; as well as to help him or her consider whether those are really the kinds of things that will make him or her happy. The ultimate goal of these questions, however, is to help your child think about the components of happiness, as well as whether there are times when happiness is all that matters.

The second set of questions address the difference between *needs* and *wants*. The aim is to help them articulate the difference between these two, and to recognize that often they can be conflated. These questions can be linked to story by drawing your child's attention to the promise to "water" the dog as well as play tennis with it.

The third set of questions addresses questions surrounding having, and being, pets. The ultimate goal is to help your child think about what makes something a pet. Useful comparisons are to things that we use as tools or toys, like the tennis racquet that Pigeon talks about. Examples that are not addressed in the questions, but which might be useful for discussion - indeed, your child may bring these up! - are animals in zoos, work animals

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(seeing eye dogs; search and rescue dogs, etc.), as well as factory animals (cows, pigs, chickens). There is even the possibility that the issue of slavery arise.

The final set of questions addresses the ethical issues that can arise from having pets. These questions intersect largely with the topics of the second and third set of questions (and tangentially, the first as well). The goal of these questions is to help your child think about whether there are some animals that should not be pets and why. The questions try to expand from the danger that Pigeon feels when the puppy is around, to the danger that we might be in, were we to have some animals as pets. The questions then encourage your child to expand these 'not good for me' thoughts to the broader 'not good for animals' thoughts. Thus, just as there are some things that human beings need to thrive and live decent lives, the questions ask your child to consider if there are things that animals need to thrive and lead decent lives. Again, these questions lend themselves easily to discussions regarding factory farming and animals in captivity.

### Questions For Discussion:

#### *Preferences and Happiness*

1. Why doesn't the dog make Pigeon happy?
2. Do you think having a walrus will make Pigeon happy? Why/ Why not?
3. What are two things you think, if you had them, would make you really happy?
4. Have you ever wanted something that you thought would make you happy, but when you got it, it didn't?
5. How can you tell what will make you happy? Is it possible that the two things won't make you happy?
6. Is happiness all that matters? Can somethings, sometimes, be more important than happiness?

#### *Needing and Wanting*

1. Is watering a dog once a month good for it?
2. Do dogs like, or want, to play tennis?
3. Do different pets want and need different things?
4. How do you know what a pet needs and wants?
5. What is the difference between *needing* something and *wanting* something?
6. What's something that you need? What's something that you want?
7. Can you need something that you don't want? If so, can you give an example?
8. Can you want something that you don't need? If so, can you give an example?
9. Can you want some things that you shouldn't get?

#### *The Nature of a Pet*

1. Can Pigeon have the puppy as a pet?
2. What's the difference between a pet and a toy?
3. Are there some things that you can do with a toy that you can't do with pets?
4. Can anything be a pet? A toy? A walrus? People?

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5. What makes something a pet?

*What Should be a Pet?*

1. Why doesn't Pigeon want the puppy as a pet?
2. Are there some animals that we wouldn't want as pets?
3. If it can be bad for us as humans to have some animals as pets, can it be bad for some animals to *be* pets?

Pick your favorite animal. What would the best zoo have to have in order for your animal to be happy?