



Taking Care of Our Classroom Pet

Adapted from	Taking Care of Our Classroom Pet
Pet: Hamster	Class: PK - 2

Brief Overview:

Students embark on a budgeting adventure to furnish a hamster home! After learning about hamster needs, they "shop" for food, bedding, and a toy within a \$20 budget, recording their choices and costs in a data chart. This engaging activity combines math and science, fostering budgeting skills, data analysis, and empathy for animal care.

This lesson is easily adaptable for other pets or grades.

Essential Question

How can we choose the best items for a hamster while staying within a budget?

Lesson Breakdown

Lesson 1: Whats Does a Hamster Need?

Lesson 2: Go Shopping!

Subjects

- ☒ Science
- ☐ ELA
- ☒ Math
- ☐ STEM
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Other

Stem Connections

Science:
Technology:
Engineering:
Math:

Performance Expectations/ Standards

NGSS

2-LS4-1 Make observations to produce evidence that living things depend on their environment. This standard can be covered by discussing the basic needs of hamsters and how the chosen food, bedding, and toys contribute to their well-being within their environment (the hamster cage).

CCSS

2.MD.C.8 Solve word problems involving money, addition, and subtraction.

I CAN statements

- plan and manage a budget.
- data and record information in a data chart.
- analyze and compare data.
- Solve real life problems involving money
- Use addition strategies to add cost of three items
- Use subtraction strategies to determine change

Materials

- Pencils and paper
- [Hamster Math: Student Worksheet](#)

Teacher Background

Hamsters are small rodents native to Asia and Europe. They are popular pets due to their small size, low-maintenance care requirements, and friendly personalities. Hamsters come in a variety of colors and sizes, with the most common breed being the Syrian hamster, also known as the golden hamster.

Physical Characteristics

Hamsters are characterized by their soft, furry bodies, short tails, and large cheek pouches. They have sharp incisors that grow continuously throughout their lives, which they use for gnawing and grooming. Hamsters have poor eyesight but excellent hearing and sense of smell.

Diet and Habitat

Hamsters are omnivorous, meaning they eat both plants and animals. In the wild, they typically feed on seeds, fruits, and insects. As pets, hamsters should be fed a commercial hamster food that is specifically formulated to meet their nutritional needs. Hamsters also require fresh water at all times.

Hamsters are naturally solitary animals and should be housed in individual cages. The minimum cage size for a hamster is 12 inches by 12 inches, but larger is always better. The cage should be filled with bedding, such as shredded newspaper or aspen shavings. Hamsters need plenty of exercise, so it is important to provide them with toys and accessories, such as an exercise wheel, climbing toys, and chew toys.

Behavior

Hamsters are crepuscular animals, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk. They are also nocturnal, meaning they are active at night. Hamsters are generally gentle and docile animals, but they can become aggressive if they feel threatened. It is important to handle hamsters with care and to supervise children around them.

Lifespan

The average lifespan of a hamster is two to three years. With proper care, some hamsters can live up to four years.

Benefits of Owning a Hamster

Owning a hamster can be a rewarding experience. Hamsters can make great companions for people of all ages, including children. They are relatively low-maintenance pets, and their small size makes them ideal for apartment living. Hamsters can also provide companionship and stress relief.

Lesson 1: What Does a Hamster Need?

Time	Materials	Activity
15 mins		<p>Begin by introducing a KWL chart (What we know about hamsters, What we want to know about hamsters, What we learned about hamsters) and having the students share what they already know about hamsters.</p> <p>Then, make the hamster visible to the children and see what they can add to the W and L portion of the chart. (examples: how many toes does it have? does it have teeth?)</p> <p>Establish rules for safety for hamsters (and us) and post. Encourage children to give gentle reminders to one another about the rules.</p>
10 mins		<p>Establish rules for safety for hamsters (and us) and post. Encourage children to give gentle reminders to one another about the rules.</p>

20 mins	Books Note a list of suggested books is included at the end of the lesson.	Read both fiction and nonfiction books about hamsters to determine their needs, wants, and how to keep them safe (as well as us) List more under L on your chart through discussion. Encourage students to identify what their hamster needs (bedding, food, toys, etc.)
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Lesson 2: Go Shopping!

Time	Materials	Activity
30 mins	Paper, pencil, Hamster Math: Student Worksheet	<p>Introduce the \$20 budget and explain the shopping challenge. Ask students to consider the importance of responsible spending and choosing appropriate items for the hamster's well-being.</p> <p>Tell students: Imagine you were given \$20. You must buy three items for the hamster (one food, one bedding, one "toy") How close can you come to using your whole \$20 without going over? Look at your choices on the worksheet and record cost and item description information in your data chart.</p> <p><i>Another idea:</i> <i>Display the pictures or use a play store (classroom corner with labeled items) for students to "shop" within their budget</i></p>
15 mins		Have groups share their shopping sprees. Ask them to explain their choices and how they stayed within budget. Discuss the importance of considering both price and animal needs when choosing items.

Assessment				
Category	4 Points (Exceeds Expectations)	3 Points (Meets Expectations)	2 Points (Approaching Expectations)	1 Point (Needs Improvement)

Engagement & Discussion	Actively participates in all discussions, asks insightful questions, and contributes original ideas. Listens respectfully to others' opinions	Participates in most discussions, asks some questions, and contributes mostly relevant ideas. Sometimes listens to others	Participates in some discussions, asks few questions, and contributes basic ideas. Rarely listens to others and may interrupt or talk over them.	Rarely participates in discussions, asks no questions, and offers little or no contribution. Does not listen to others and may be disruptive.
Data Chart Accuracy & Completeness	Data chart is accurate, complete, and well-organized with clear labels and headings. All relevant information is recorded and presented neatly.	Data chart is mostly accurate and complete with some minor errors or missing information. Labels and headings are mostly clear and organized.	Data chart has some significant errors or missing information. Labels and headings may be unclear or missing.	Data chart is inaccurate, incomplete, and poorly organized. Labels and headings are unclear or missing.
Explanation & Justification	Explanation for chosen items is clear, detailed, and logical. Justification is well-supported by data and evidence from the project.	Explanation for chosen items is mostly clear and relevant. Justification is somewhat supported by data but may lack detail or clarity.	Explanation for chosen items is unclear or incomplete. Justification is weak or missing.	Explanation and justification for chosen items are unclear or absent.
Participation & Understanding	Actively participates in all activities, demonstrating strong understanding of the project goals and tasks. Applies learning creatively and effectively.	Participates in most activities, demonstrating some understanding of the project goals and tasks. Applies learning mostly effectively.	Participates in some activities, demonstrating limited understanding of the project goals and tasks. Struggles to apply learning effectively.	Rarely participates in activities, demonstrating minimal understanding of the project goals and tasks. Difficulty applying learning.

Differentiation

For students who need additional support:

- Provide laminated shopping lists with pictures and prices for struggling students.
- Allow students to use play money as they “buy” their items
- Offer pre-filled data charts with blanks for cost input for younger students.

For students who need additional challenges:

- Challenge advanced students to research additional hamster items and calculate their total cost without exceeding the budget.

Extension

- Create a miniature hamster habitat, using the chosen items to decorate and furnish it.
- Write a short story about the hamster's day, incorporating its new food, bedding, and toy.
- Compare prices of similar items at different "stores" (websites, pet shops) to practice consumer skills.

Suggested books

Scillian Hamster in a Hamper by Lucy Daniels
Trouble according to Humphrey by Betty Birney
Mysteries according to Humphrey by Betty Birney
Homemade for Hamster by Carin Oliver
Summer according to Humphrey by Betty Birney
My Hamster by Peter Fritzsche
Max and Mo's first day at school by Brian Floca
Max and Mo go apple picking by Brian Floca
Looking after hamsters by Brian Floca
Hamsters for kids by John Davidson
Little Animal Ark: the happy hamster by Lucy Daniels
Tiny hamster is a GIANT MONSTER by Joel Jensen
Hamster Princess: Harriet the Invincible by Ursula Vernon
The Hamster Book by Silvia Borando
Hamster Princess: Ratpunzel by Ursula Vernon
No more hitting for Little Hamster! by Bernette Ford
Hamster and Cheese by Colleen Venable
Let's take care of our new hamster by Garcia Sabates
My hamster and me by Peter Hollmann
Hamster chase by Anastasia Suen
Hamstersaurus Rex by Tom O'Donnell
Take your pet to the vet by Sara Miller
Teacher's Pet by Julie Andrews