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4th Grade

Topic: What changes do cats and dogs have to make to live and survive as homeless pets?

The streets are black with grime. The air smells of smog and trash. Your fur rustles in the sour breeze. Somewhere, far off, a car honks. You are lost...

Many people own pets; many people lose pets. Some of those pets are lucky enough to quickly make it back to their owners; others are not so lucky. In the book *The Grand Escape*, Marco and Polo, two cats, managed to escape from their home because their owner made one critical mistake: he didn't believe they would ever escape - but they did, and they were lost for a long time, suffering numerous hardships on their own.

Homeless pets have to make many changes to survive without their owners. They must learn to fend for themselves. They need to find their own food and clean water. They must avoid major threats such as predators, cars, and cruel humans. They can suffer from disease and parasites without someone to take them to the vet. They have to cope with unfamiliar natural forces, such as extremes of temperature and weather. Perhaps most of all, the thing they're missing without their owners is love.

Like innocent children, pets are used to being cared for by their owners. They think their food comes from the "magical bag" of yummys in the pantry. They don't know where it really comes from or how to get it without their owners. Unlike wild animals, they aren't used to catching food in the wild or scrounging food in the city. For instance, kittens have to be - but are often not - taught by their mother how to kill and eat prey for food. In addition, homeless pets

would have to find clean water to drink to avoid poisoning and disease. Pets typically never have to defend themselves against animals that try to eat them. They don't know to avoid predators, and are poorly equipped to defend themselves. It would be especially hard for animals that have been declawed, since they don't have one of their best weapons and escape mechanisms, their claws. That's one of the reasons it's not a good idea to declaw your pet, because you never know when they might get loose. Homeless pets would also have to find shelter. Even if they did, they would likely still suffer from being too hot, too cold, or being wet and sick.

There are some easy ways to help ensure that if you lose a pet, they'll make their way back to your loving arms. First, make sure your pet wears a collar with a tag that includes your name and current address and phone number. Second, especially if your pet goes outside, have it microchipped so that it can be traced back to you. So you see, it is important to keep your pets inside and tag them in case they do get lost, so they won't end up like homeless, abandoned children, suffering the unimaginable, having to learn to survive on their own.