

The History of House Cats

A Reading A-Z Level M Leveled Book
Word Count: 536

Connections

Writing

Research to learn more about taking care of a cat. Create a brochure that includes information about cat behavior, a cat's basic needs, and important tips people should think about before bringing a cat home.

Science and Art

Research one of the breeds of cats from the book to learn more about it. Create a poster to share with your class about the cat, including a picture and interesting facts.

Reading A-Z

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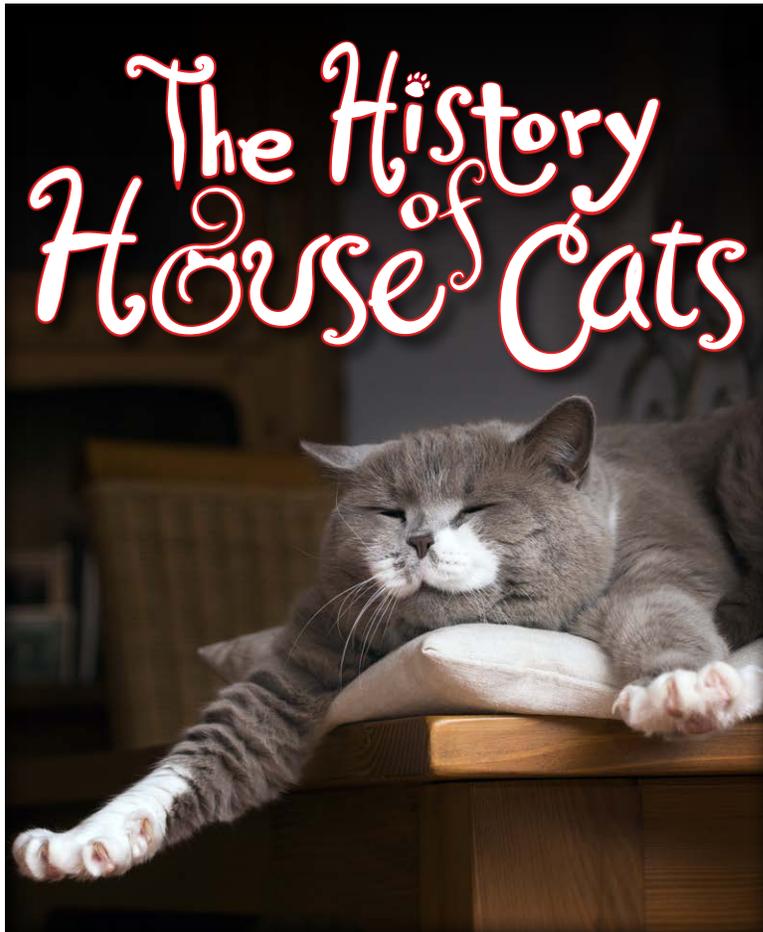
LEVELED BOOK • M

The History of House Cats



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Focus Question

How did the relationship between cats and people change over time?

Words to Know

bred	pests
features	superstitions
mummies	tame

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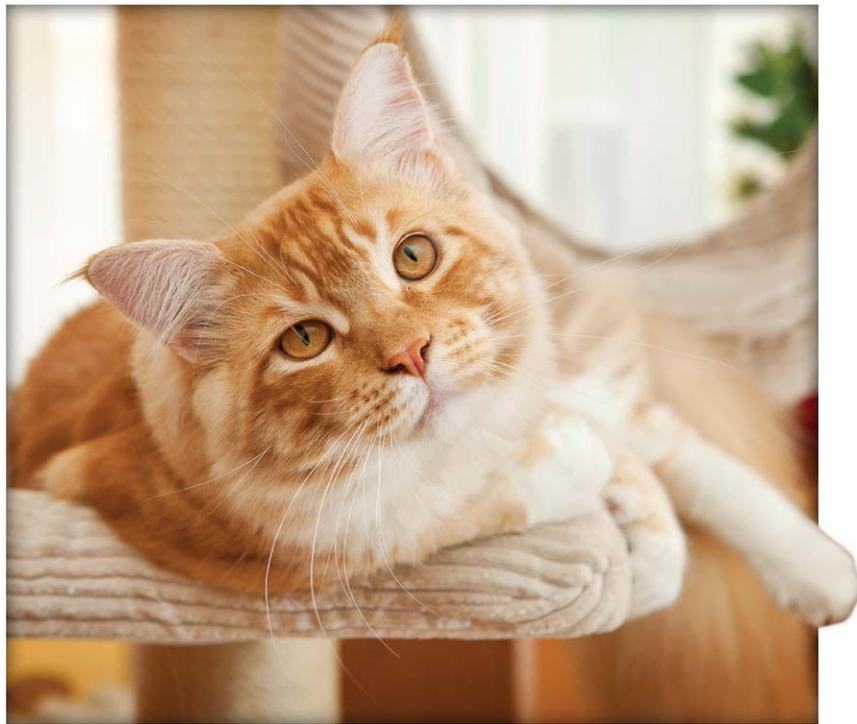
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Correlation

LEVEL M

Fountas & Pinnell	L
Reading Recovery	19
DRA	24



An Unlikely Friend

Cats are the world's most popular pet. However, they are different from most other **tame** animals. Cats are friendly, but they don't need help from others—they usually hunt and live alone.

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Over time, cats have developed into many different breeds and colors.



In the United States, one in every three households has a pet cat or two.

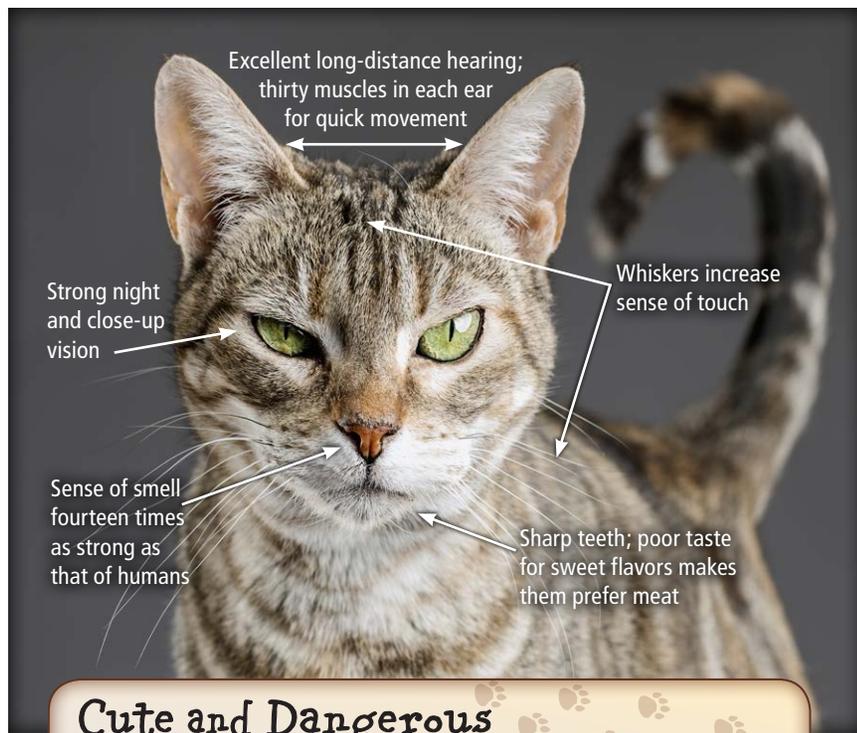
Cats also don't work for humans in the same way that dogs, cows, horses, and sheep do. This means that cats and humans are a surprising pair. So how did cats become some of our dearest friends?

The Taming of Cats

Some scientists think that cats were first tamed in the Middle East about twelve thousand years ago. At that time, people began to grow and store grain for food. Mice and rats came to eat the grain, and cats came to hunt them. People might have started feeding cats because they were happy to get rid of the **pests**. Over time, cats that were better with people **bred** rapidly near towns. These cats were especially successful because they could easily get food.



People still keep barn cats on their farms and ranches to control pests.



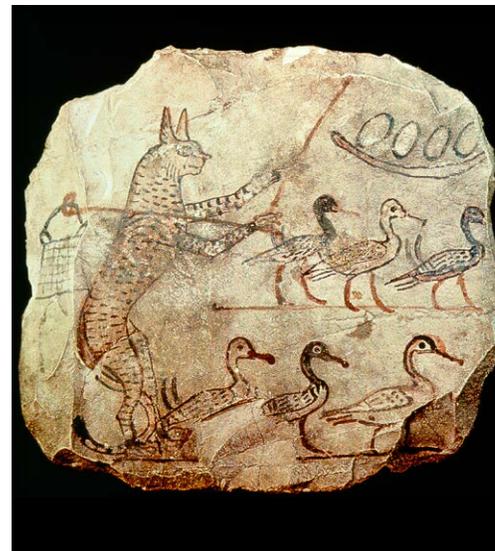
Cute and Dangerous

Cats may look adorable, but their physical traits and strong senses make them excellent hunters as well.

Some scientists think that people simply may have liked the way cats looked. Cats have big eyes and round faces. These **features** tend to bring out a caring response in humans. In other words, people may have taken in cats because they are cute.

A Growing Friendship

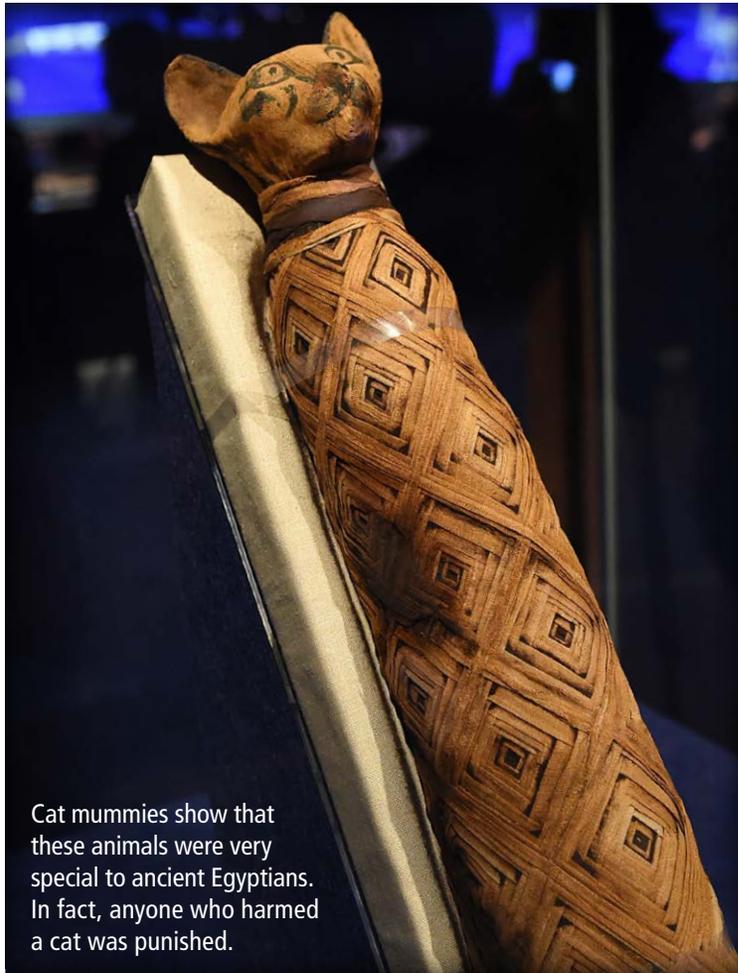
The friendship between cats and people grew over time. In ancient Egypt, for example, people believed that cats were magical animals that brought good luck. Some of their gods even took the form of cats.



This ancient Egyptian drawing shows a cat watching over geese (left). The ancient Egyptian goddess Bastet had the head of a cat (right).



People in ancient Egypt made **mummies** of their dead as a sign of love and respect. They did the same for their pet cats that passed away.



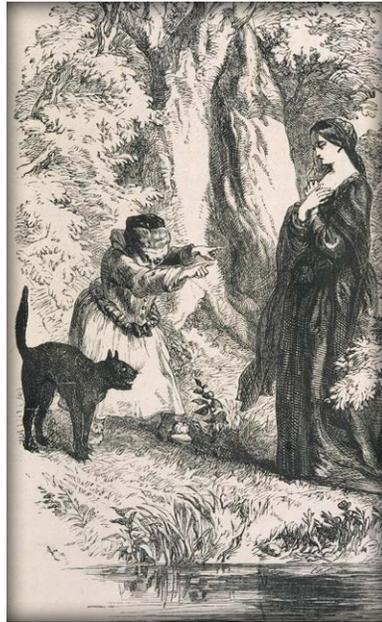
Cat mummies show that these animals were very special to ancient Egyptians. In fact, anyone who harmed a cat was punished.

Experts think that tame cats spread quickly around the ancient world on ships that carried grain. The cats were brought on board to hunt mice. In this way, cats traveled all over Europe and Asia on trade ships. They arrived in China and India about two thousand years ago. In Asia, they helped keep mice away from important papers.



Cats often appear in Asian legends and art such as this Chinese painting from the 1400s.

In the Middle Ages (500–1500 CE), however, many people in Europe began to fear cats, believing them to be evil. They had **superstitions** about wicked people who kept cats and even turned into them. Even so, many people kept tame cats during this time since cats were so useful for hunting pests.



In medieval Europe, people believed that cats followed the orders of evil people.

Helping the Hunted

Even though cats are popular for their hunting abilities, they can cause problems as well. Scientists think that cats have helped wipe out thirty-three types of birds around the world. If you have an outdoor cat, you can help the birds and other animals in your neighborhood by putting a bell on its collar.

Modern Cats

Today's indoor pet cats live differently from the cats of the past. For thousands of years, tame cats lived mostly outside. They didn't become house pets until the 1960s, when kitty litter became more common.



While outdoor cats often live fewer than three years, indoor cats usually live for fifteen to eighteen years.



European wildcat



Traditional Siamese cat

Today's pet cats also look a little different. In the past, tame cats looked like their wild cousins. Many European cats were striped since they often bred with nearby wildcats.

In Asia, where no wildcats lived to mix with tame cats, different cat breeds developed over time. The Siamese cat, with its smooth white fur and dark paws, ears, and face, is one example.



Some of the breeds shown at the first cat show (above) are pictured to the right.

In the 1800s in England, people started to breed cats in different colors. The first cat show, where people could go to see “fancy” cat breeds, was held in London. The winner was a Persian cat.



Persian



Abyssinian



British shorthair



Russian blue



Cat Companions

Cats have made friends with people all over the world for thousands of years. Since they first came into towns seeking food, cats have won us over with their playfulness and grace.

Cat Adoption

More than three million cats enter animal shelters every year in the United States. Fewer than two million of these cats are adopted. If your family is considering a pet cat, visit your local animal shelter to find a furry new friend!

Glossary

- bred** (*v.*) came together to make a baby (p. 6)
- features** (*n.*) traits, qualities, or parts of something (p. 7)
- mummies** (*n.*) the dried-out bodies of dead people or other animals (p. 9)
- pests** (*n.*) insects or other animals that are harmful (p. 6)
- superstitions** (*n.*) beliefs not based in reason that come from fear of the unknown or trust in the supernatural (p. 11)
- tame** (*adj.*) not wild; controlled or cared for by humans (p. 4)