

Questioning Our Actions Towards Animals:
Animal-Related Ethical Dilemmas for Young People



Run for Your Life! : The Brutality of Dog Racetracks

To the other kids on the bus, the greyhound racetrack was just another place they passed everyday on their way to and from school. But to Graham, it was where his dog, Blanche, was forced to race other greyhounds for the enjoyment of people. Graham could remember when he was 5 years old and his dad had brought the young greyhound home. Blanche was only three years old at the time, but when she stopped winning, her owner took her to be euthanized. That’s when a greyhound rescue group stepped in and Graham’s dad adopted Blanche into their family.

Usually nobody acknowledged the racetrack’s existence as they passed, but today was different. Graham overheard two of his classmates talking in the seat behind him.

“Have you ever been to the racetrack, Leon?” one boy asked.

“No, have you?” asked Leon.

“Not yet, but my dad said he’ll take me there once I turn 18.” Graham cringed at the thought of his classmates supporting something as cruel as the racetrack. He just couldn’t understand it.

“Seriously, Felix? That’s so cool!” replied Leon. Graham felt someone tap him on the shoulder.

“Hey, Graham, have you heard? Felix’s dad said he’ll take him to the racetrack when he turns eighteen!”

Graham hesitated. He didn’t know how to respond. He knew all the horrors of the racetrack, and he had his dog Blanche to prove it. How should Graham respond?



Knowing firsthand about the hidden horrors of dog racing, Graham has an opportunity to enlighten his classmates about something of which they know very little. Dog racing is cruel and inhumane. Dogs are confined in small cages barely large enough for them to stand or turn around for long hours each day.

The MSPCA believes that animals deserve protection from individuals and industries such as racetracks, circuses, and rodeos, which could do them harm.

Graham might want to turn around to his classmates and explain that he has some information about the track that they might not have heard. He can explain that the greyhounds used for racing go through stressful, rigorous training which sacrifices live animals for what some people call a “sport.” For many hours a day, the dogs are kept in small cages in which they have barely enough room to stand or turn. Often they don’t have fur on their bottoms and their skin is raw from rubbing against the metal cages. With little quality human interaction, they have little to no quality of life. He can

point out his own dog, Blanche, as a good example of a sweet and loving dog who was robbed of her first three years of life so that people could gamble on her performances. And he can explain further that if a rescue group didn't step in, Blanche would not have survived, since she had won her races early on and had no winning streak ahead for her owners.

Graham can explain that living animals deserve good quality lives, with loving families, exercise, quality food, veterinary care, and lots of love. He can tell his classmates that when Blanche first came to their house, she didn't know how to play because no one had ever played with her, and she only felt comfortable sleeping in a tight cage, not the comfy dog bed in which she now sleeps. Like many other greyhounds who had broken their toes at the track, resulting in missing or deformed toes, Blanche bore several painful scars on her feet. It took a while for Blanche to re-learn that people are social creatures who can actually be kind and good. But now she is finally a happy and contented dog.

If the boys are receptive to Graham's explanations, he might suggest having them tell their families about what they learned and encourage them not to frequent the racetrack. Graham can introduce everyone to his graceful and gentle Blanche, identifying her as a pet, and not an unwilling athlete. And, maybe they could all take their dogs for hikes together instead at the local state park, with Blanche leading the way. Even if Leon or Felix do not lose interest in going to the racetrack, at least they have heard Graham and what information he has presented. Additionally, time is on Graham's side because the boys still have more than a few years to go until they are 18; by then, either Leon or Felix may have absorbed enough about dog racing to make a more humane decision to forgo the track, or a law banning dog racing will hopefully have been put into effect.