

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



**Judging Each Dog Fairly: Exploring Breed-Specific Laws**

Olivia and Faye went everywhere together; their only differences were that Olivia walked on two feet and went to school and Faye walked on four and had a tail. But, despite this difference, they were just like any two best friends. When Olivia got home from school on weekdays, she and Faye would walk around town and stop by a local farm stand for ice cream (cookie dough for Olivia and a dog biscuit for Faye). And, on weekends, the inseparable pair would volunteer at their local adoption center, teaching others about animals in humane education classes. Wherever they went, everyone loved Faye.

One afternoon, Olivia and a group of friends were at her house researching current events for a school project when she came across an article in the paper. “LOCAL PIT BULL, ROTTWEILER BAN BEING CONSIDERED BY MAYOR,” read the headline. Olivia stared at it for a moment, until one of her friends peered over her shoulder.

“Have you ever seen one of those pit bulls?” the boy, Jack said to the group. “They’re super vicious!”

“I have,” Ali said. “One chased my cousin down the street one time! It was so scary. I really hope that ban gets passed.”

Olivia had always known that Faye was a mutt. She had rescued her from the same adoption center at which they now volunteered. But, Olivia had also known that Faye was half Rottweiler and half pit bull, and it was this fact that she had kept hidden for fear that people would be scared of her dog. And now, the girl was even more worried than ever. What would happen to Faye if the breed ban was put in place and if people began to recognize her features as those of the outlawed breeds?

Olivia wants to speak out about how these dogs really are, but she is afraid that this might endanger her beloved dog. What can she do?



If Olivia can muster up enough courage, she and Faye can use this great opportunity to teach others about the misunderstanding of pit bulls and Rottweilers.

The MSPCA believes that breed-specific laws, those prohibiting people from having certain breeds of dogs, unfairly stereotype all dogs of a particular breed, ignoring behavioral history. However, the laws do not affect dangerous dogs of other breeds, so they are not effective in controlling all dangerous dogs.

To add to the conversation, Olivia can point out that her sweet and lovable Faye is part Rottweiler and pit bull, or American Staffordshire Terrier, as some are more formally known. She can tell her friends that the qualities unfairly associated with these dogs are not typical of the breeds and remind them that Faye is considered a beloved member of the community and a great competitor in local

agility competitions. While volunteering at the shelter, Olivia has learned that any dog can bite, so kids need to be safe around all dogs. But, her friends can be assured that Faye has never bitten or displayed aggression.

Olivia can tell her friends that it is a shame that these breeds have gotten a bad reputation from the media. Dangerous dogs are often the result of abusive people. Some of these people train the dogs to be mean and cause harm so their owners can acquire money and drugs through illegal fighting, in which many dogs die. Others use them for protection in gangs or as status symbols. These innocent and loyal dogs—often pit bulls and Rottweilers—normally have big, teddy-bear personalities. But, because their appearances can be viewed as intimidating, they have been singled out as being dangerous when the truth is that they have been trained and tortured to cause harm.

If Olivia and her friends help speak out together on behalf of misunderstood dogs, more people will be aware and call for the prosecution of the abusers. Young people have the power to be heard and can write letters to TV and radio stations and can even be published in the “Letters to the Editor” sections of newspapers and magazines. This is a great way to get issues and opinions out to people, and if Jack, Ali, and others sign the letter, too, it would be even more powerful. Olivia and her friends can also start a letter campaign or petition asking the city councilors or mayor to reconsider the bans on these breeds. State representatives and senators are also great contacts; encouraging them to help sponsor a bill prohibiting breed specific laws, aid in the breaking up of dog-fighting rings, and prosecute those involved in animal abuse would make a huge difference. Contacting local humane organizations to find out what they are doing to help the dogs can be even more efficient by joining campaigns already in progress. Remember--change can happen through education! Educating others about the truths of pit bulls, Rottweilers, and other breeds is taking a giant step towards making the world a better place for all dogs.