

Mother Cats and Their Kittens

by ReadWorks



Have you ever watched a mother cat with her babies? Mother cats are very protective of their kittens, even before they are born. Mother cats have to protect their babies so that they can grow up to be big cats.

First, a mother cat chooses a safe place to give birth to her kittens. Unlike a human, the mother cat can't go to a hospital to have her babies, so she must look for someplace near home that is right for her babies. A safe place for kittens can't be too loud, too busy, or too bright. If she lives inside a house with humans, the mother cat might go underneath a bed or staircase, inside a closet, or into a basement area that is nice and quiet. There, she will make a soft nest for her kittens.

Next, the mother cat will give birth to her babies and nurse them right away with her milk. When a kitten is born, it doesn't have very much fur and is "blind" for a few days. (Kittens' eyes usually open up after about eight days.) Like human infants and other mammal babies, the kittens need a lot of help from their mother when they are first born, since they are very weak and small. Their mother spends a lot of time feeding them and giving them baths by licking them.

After a few days, the mother cat might choose to move her kittens to another safe place so that predators, like owls or coyotes, cannot find them by their smell. When she finds the right place, she will carry her kittens to their new home in her mouth, very gently. If a kitten gets

lost along the way, it can help its mother find her way back by calling her ("mew mew!"). Soon, all of the kittens will be safe and sound in their new nest.

There are usually many kittens in a cat family. A group of kittens in a cat family is called a litter. When the kittens are big enough to open their eyes and move around, they will begin to play and fight with one another, just like human brothers and sisters. Though these games are fun, they also have a serious purpose. When kittens play, they are practicing many skills they will need later on, like jumping, pouncing, and biting. This will help them catch prey for food and fight against predators.

As the kittens grow bigger, the mother will continue to protect them from enemies and even her human friends! Mother cats do not like it when adult humans or children play with their kittens, and they may attack. Kittens may also bite and scratch to protect themselves against harm. So even though they can be very cute, you must always be careful around mother cats and their litters of kittens, and you must respect their safe spaces. Remember that these cat families are only doing what they need to do to survive.

Use the article "Mother Cats and Their Kittens" to answer questions 1 and 2.

1. What is one thing that mother cats do to help kittens grow bigger and stronger?
 - A. She goes to the hospital to have her kittens.
 - B. She does not bathe them.
 - C. She leaves them out in the open.
 - D. She spends a lot of time feeding them.
2. The main purpose the author wrote this article was to-
 - A. Convince the reader to get a kitten as a pet
 - B. Entertain the reader with a story about cute kittens
 - C. Tell the reader facts about mother cats and their kittens
 - D. Inform the reader about why cats are better than dogs

The Chicken and the Egg

by Aditi Sriram



For her eighth birthday, Kit's parents gave her a large purple box with holes in the top. Was there an animal inside the box that needed air to breathe? Was it a baby hamster, like the one in Mrs. Bernstein's classroom? She held the box carefully, but it didn't seem heavy enough. With her mother's help she cut the ribbon off the top of the box and removed the lid. Inside was a scrawny, golden chick!

"What are you going to name it?" Mom asked.

"Is it a boy chick or a girl chick?" Kit asked.

"We asked at the farm, and they told us it's a girl," Dad said.

Kit thought for a minute. The chick's feathers were yellow and bright, and reminded her of her best friend at school. "I'm going to name her Annabelle," she said, "because they have the same color hair."

Kit cradled Annabelle in her hands carefully, stroking the chick's soft, fluffy feathers with her fingers. "She's so soft," Kit said to Mom.

"Annabelle is covered with special feathers called down. They keep the chick warm."

Kit watched Annabelle grow week after week. She did not worry about letting Annabelle walk all over her hands and arms, because chicks do not have teeth. As Annabelle's little body became bigger, she grew larger feathers. She pointed out the new feathers to her father.

"Those are called contour feathers, and the long ones on her sides are flight feathers," Dad said.

It was becoming harder to play with Annabelle. She was 12 weeks old now and much faster on her feet. Annabelle would dart around the garden when Kit let her out of her coop and peck at everything on the ground in front of her. She was always clucking at everyone and would dip her head into the grass to grab a worm. Kit would run behind her and try to catch Annabelle with her hands, and it would take minutes to finally get ahold of her. Mom would watch Kit running around and laugh. Dad would make clucking sounds to distract Annabelle, and then Kit would catch her.

When Annabelle was 16 weeks old, Kit's once little chick was now five times as big, a strong, healthy hen, with all kinds of beautiful feathers and a much larger beak, and laying eggs. One day, a rooster, an adult version of a boy chick, who belonged to Kit's neighbor, went to Annabelle's coop. After a few days, Kit saw Annabelle sitting on some eggs. When Annabelle moved, she used her beak to turn the eggs around underneath her. Kit understood what was going to happen. Annabelle was going to become a mom! Kit made sure Annabelle's water and food were nearby, and she was excited.

Annabelle was a lot more patient than Kit. For 21 days she sat on her eggs, covering them with her feathers to keep them warm. Finally, Kit heard a crack. She looked closely. Annabelle had moved aside, and there was one of her eggs, white and grey, and a tiny, tiny beak poking through it. Kit wanted to watch the baby slowly poke its way out of the egg, but it was getting very late. Kit went to sleep and returned to watch the baby hatch the next day. By the time it came out, it looked very tired and wet. Kit watched Annabelle peck at her baby until the baby fell asleep.

Over dinner, Kit told her parents about Annabelle's baby hatching. Mom and Dad explained that this was the life cycle of a chicken, starting as a baby that comes out of an egg, growing bigger and fluffier, becoming a hen, and then laying eggs. Kit picked at the vegetables on her plate-carrots, beans, and cabbage-and wondered, "Do vegetables lay eggs, too?"

"No, they don't," Mom said, "but it's a good question. We plant seeds in the ground, where they stay warm and get water, and when they are ready to germinate, they begin growing out of the ground where we can see them, and get bigger and stronger, with more leaves and thicker stems, and then they produce fruits and flowers. Plants, like animals, have a life cycle

that repeats and repeats."

Kit nodded her head. The hamster in her classroom had gotten older and bigger; and now that Annabelle was a mother, she was excited to have a new baby chick to play with, all over again.

Use the article "The Chicken and the Egg" to answer questions 3 and 4.

3. What was Annabelle like when she was 16 weeks old?

- A. Annabelle was scrawny and golden.
- B. Annabelle was big and strong.
- C. Annabelle was fast and would run around everywhere.
- D. Annabelle sat on her eggs.

4. Read the following sentences from the story.

"Kit wanted to watch the baby slowly poke its way out of the egg, but it was getting very late. Kit went to sleep and returned to watch the baby hatch the next day."

Based on these sentences, we can tell that Kit is-

- A. Frustrated
- B. Curious
- C. Lazy
- D. Selfish

Use the articles "The Chicken and the Egg" and "Mother Cats and Their Kittens" to complete the Venn Diagram.

