#94 Pets & Animals

Paws, claws, and the rest of us LEVEL 4 | FREE TALK

PALLO!

ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

1 **Cat person, dog person, or neither? Pick one!**

2 **If you had to compare yourself to an animal, which one would it be, and why?**

FREE TALK

purple bold = good to know · **highlight** = key expressions

1 Laws in many countries keep animals like tigers, monkeys, and penguins **off-limits** as pets, both for people's safety and for the animals' own welfare. But imagine, just for fun, that no rules applied. **If you could keep any animal as a pet, which one would you choose, and why? What might go hilariously wrong?**

2 In the West, the lion is the classic symbol of royalty, while in Korea, the tiger **takes center stage** in folk tales and Olympic mascots like Hodori and Soohorang. Each culture seems to have crowned its own king. **Which would win in a fight, and why do you think different cultures chose different animals to look up to?**

3 Pet-friendly cafés, offices, and shops are popping up everywhere, and dogs in restaurants have become **a bone of contention**. For some, a dog at the next table is a joy; for others, it ruins the meal. **If you ran a café, would you make it pet-friendly, and what rules would you set?**

4 Critics see a zoo as **a gilded cage**, where animals meant to roam spend their lives on display. Supporters argue that zoos protect animals, rescuing injured wildlife and bringing species like the California condor back **from the brink of extinction**. **Do you see zoos more as prisons or as protectors, and what would earn your support?**

5 In 2025, a US biotech company announced it had created wolf pups with traits of the extinct dire wolf, and it hopes to bring back the woolly mammoth next. Some call it a breakthrough for conservation, while others say scientists are **playing God**. **Should we bring extinct animals back to life, and if you could revive one, which would it be?**

KEY EXPRESSIONS

Slip a couple of these into your answers.

off-limits
not allowed to be entered, used, or owned

take center stage
become the main focus of attention

a bone of contention
a subject people keep arguing about

a gilded cage
a comfortable place that still takes away freedom

the brink of extinction
the point of almost dying out completely

play God
act as if you control nature or life

SAY IT BETTER

The professional line isn't a direct replacement for the everyday one; it's the same idea in a semi-formal, business style.

EVERYDAY		PROFESSIONAL
I'd really love to have a penguin.	→	I'd **jump at the chance to** keep a penguin.
Lions and tigers mean different things in different countries.	→	Lions and tigers **carry different symbolic weight** across cultures. ***Nuance:*** *Handy in presentations comparing cultures or markets.*
Dogs are OK, but only small ones.	→	Dogs are welcome, **provided that** they're small. ***Nuance:*** *Sets a clear condition; common in policies and contracts.*
Zoos have good and bad sides.	→	Zoos have **both merits and drawbacks**.
Bringing back extinct animals is too risky.	→	Reviving extinct species **poses considerable risks**. ***Nuance:*** *Measured and objective; suits reports and debates.*

DEBATE: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Should pet owners pay a pet tax?

1 WARM UP · No sides yet. Share your own story first.

1. What do you think it costs to keep a dog or cat each month? **Would that put you off, or is it worth it?**
2. Think of something your taxes pay for that you rarely use yourself. **How do you feel about chipping in for it?**

2 SITUATION · Read aloud, one sentence each.

About three in ten Korean households now keep a pet, spending an average of **121,000 won** a month on it. Yet more than **100,000** animals have been lost or abandoned every year since 2017, and running shelters costs about **37.4 billion won** a year. To help foot the bill, the government floated a **pet ownership tax** in 2020 but shelved it amid public backlash, and the idea resurfaced in 2024. Supporters say that owners who benefit from pets should cover the public costs they create, and that a fee would make people think twice before getting one. Germany is often cited as a model: local authorities levy an annual dog tax, **€120** (about 178,000 won) for a first dog in Berlin, and collected **€421 million** (about 624 billion won) in 2023, though the money is not earmarked for animals. Opponents argue that responsible owners would end up paying for those who abandon animals, that some might dump their pets to avoid the charge, and that at least a quarter of dogs are still unregistered. **Should Korea make pet owners pay a pet tax?**

3 TWO SIDES · Everyone picks one. No need for equal sides!

A TAX

votes ☐

"If you choose to keep a pet, you should help cover what it costs society."

Shelters run on public money, so owners who benefit should chip in. A yearly fee would also be a deterrent against bringing a pet home on impulse.

B DON'T TAX

votes ☐

"Why should responsible owners pay for those who walk away?"

Owners already spend heavily on care, and some might dump pets to dodge the fee. And if the money isn't earmarked, it's just a cash grab.

Everyone speaks once before anyone speaks twice · Answer the last person **first**, then add your point.

4 FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS · Ask one that could make the other side rethink.

ASK SIDE A

- If a quarter of dogs aren't even registered, who would actually end up paying?
- What would stop some owners from dumping pets just to dodge the fee?
- If the money isn't earmarked, how is it anything but a cash grab?

ASK SIDE B

- Shelter costs run into the billions. Who should foot the bill instead?
- If owners spend about 121,000 won a month, is a small yearly fee really a burden?
- Without a fee, what would make people think twice before getting a pet?

USEFUL LINE "I see where you're coming from, but…" *I see where you're coming from, but a tax won't fix registration.*

5 FINAL ROUND · Don't skip this part!

FINAL POSITION	"In the end, I'd **support / oppose** a pet tax, because…" Did anyone switch sides? Why?	**BEST POINT**	"As the other side **rightly said**…" Name the best point you heard today.

KEY EXPRESSIONS

levy officially charge a tax or fee	**foot the bill** pay for something, often unwillingly	**shelve** put a plan aside for now
a deterrent something that discourages an action	**earmarked** set aside for one purpose only	**a cash grab** a scheme mainly to collect money

Data: The Korea Times (Jan 16, 2020; Feb 17, 2026), Hankyung Magazine (Sep 30, 2024), The Spectator (Oct 26, 2024).

PALLO!