

## **Your Shortcut to... Designer Pets**

They're cuter, fluffier and friendlier; humans have been creating them for thousands of years; and some even glow in the dark. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to Designer Pets—the podcast where we dive into the who, what, where, when, why and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Hey Bryce, what's that you're drawing? Is that... a lion with butterfly wings?

Yep! It's my dream pet. It's got the roar of a lion but flutters like a butterfly. I call it... the "Lio-fly"! Pretty cool, huh?

Very creative, Bryce! But it's actually got me thinking about real-life designer pets. Did you know that humans have been shaping animals for thousands of years to create our perfect companions?

Wait, like, turning wolves into Chihuahuas? Or making cats less... scratchy?

Exactly! And we're going to unpack all of that today

Today, we're digging into the fascinating world of designer pets to take you through What they are, How humans create them, and Why we need to think carefully before getting one. So, grab your pet's lead, give them a cuddle, and get ready—because here we go!

Listen carefully - there's a S'Quiz at the end!

WHAT

So Bryce, what do you think the very first pets were?

Hmm... maybe, dinosaurs? Imagine taking a T-rex for walkies!

That would be pretty cool but not quite. They were actually wolves! Around 15,000 years ago, humans tamed friendly wolves to help with hunting and protection. Over time, those wolves turned into the dogs we know today.

So, humans saw wolves and thought, "Hey, let's turn those sharp-toothed hunters into... cuddly Labradors?"

Pretty much! Humans noticed which wolves were calm and friendly, then bred those ones together. Over many generations, their puppies became more like pets and less like wild animals.

What about cats? Were they, like, ancient mouse-catching ninjas?

Spot on! Wildcats were kept to protect food supplies from pests. But the ones that were friendly and liked humans ended up being kept as pets.

And now we have ragdoll cats that flop around like cuddly toys. Genius!

Exactly! And today, we call pets like that "designer pets" because they're bred to have specific traits that humans prefer. Like labradoodles that don't make you sneeze and itch, pups that fit into tea cups, and ragdoll cats that will love you rather than hiss at you like my cats!

Wow, we've come a long way from wolves and wildcats to lapdogs and ragdolls! But Christie, how have humans created these designer pets? Is there some kind of magic involved?

HOW

There's no magic involved in creating designer pets, Bryce—just selective breeding. It's kinda like mixing paint to get the perfect colour. Humans choose animals with traits they like—like being friendly or fluffy—and breed them together. Over time, those traits get passed down.

So, if I wanted a dog with super-long ears, I'd just find two long-eared dogs and play matchmaker?

That's right! And it's been used to create all sorts of pets. You've seen pugs, right? With their adorable wrinkly faces and small size. They were bred to be great companions.

Ah yes, the ultimate couch potato dog! Perfect for snuggling and snoozing.

Then there are huskies—strong, energetic, and bred for pulling sleds in icy conditions

And for looking absolutely majestic while doing it! Seriously, those eyes!

It's not just pets, either. Farmers have used selective breeding to create cows that produce lots of milk and sheep with extra-soft wool.

So basically, humans have been playing matchmaker for animals for thousands of years! It's all about picking and choosing the best traits, like building your dream pet?

Exactly. But here's where science gets even cooler. These days, scientists can use genetics to create pets with very specific traits. Like those hypoallergenic pets for people with allergies or even glow-in-the-dark fish using jellyfish genes.

Glow-in-the-dark fish? That sounds awesome! But... wait, doesn't cloning come into this too?

It sure does. In 1996, scientists cloned the first mammal—a sheep named Dolly. Cloning is when scientists take DNA from one animal and use it to create an identical copy. Imagine if your pet passed away, and you could have an identical version of them.

Whoa, so cloning is like pressing Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V on your pet?!

Kind of! But it's not as simple as it sounds, and there are lots of questions about whether it's a good idea or not.

But if designer pets are so cool, why shouldn't everyone just have one?

WHY

Bryce there are lots of positives to designer pets, but there are also challenges too. Let's start with the good stuff - designer pets can actually be healthier because they're bred to avoid certain genetic diseases.

So we could avoid some of the problems and diseases that some pets get? Sounds good to me!

It does, doesn't it. And they're often bred to be amazing companions—like therapy dogs that help people feel calm or guide dogs that assist people who are blind or vision impaired.

Now that is impressive. A pet that's not just a best friend but also a life-changing helper! So far, so good. What's the catch?

Here's the tricky bit—while designer pets can have benefits, some also have serious health problems.

Uh-oh, that doesn't sound good. Like what?

Well, take flat-faced dogs like pugs. They might look cute, but because of the way they've been bred, many struggle to breathe properly.

Oh no! Imagine running around the park and feeling out of breath all the time. That's not fun at all.

Exactly. And then there are the big ethical questions. Like—just because we can change animals, does that mean we should?

Oof, that's deep. I mean, I'd love a glow-in-the-dark guinea pig, but is it fair to the guinea pig?

That's the big question! And what about cloning? If you cloned your dog Louis, would Louis II really be the same as the original?

I mean, he would look the same, but I guess he wouldn't have the same memories that Louis and I share.

That's exactly why scientists and pet lovers are still debating whether cloning and designer pets are the best idea for animals.

They're such big questions for little pets!

Exactly. That's why it's important to think about the pet's needs before getting one. It's not about how they look—it's about loving and caring for them properly.

Being a good pet owner isn't about picking the fanciest breed, it's about giving them the best life possible!

### THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. What mammal was the first to be cloned? (A sheep named Dolly)"

2 What's the name of a cat breed known for being super cuddly and relaxed? (The Ragdoll)

3 What is my dream pet? (The Lio-Fly)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of Designer Pets. Teachers, there are a whole heap of excellent classroom resources related to this topic on the Squiz Kids website and there's a link to them in the episode notes.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.