Podcast: Imagine This

Episode: Why don’t cats wear shoes?

Duration: 7’08

[ABC Podcast sting - This is an ABC Podcast]

Bri: Hello, my name's Bri. And today on Imagine This, I have a question for you. If you look down at your legs and you look at your knees, and then you look at your feet, I'm wondering if you might have something on your feet today.

Kids: Yes.

Bri: What have you got on your feet?

Kids: Umm...socks.

Bri: Socks.

Kids: Yeah.

Bri: Anything else?-

Kids: I have shoes.

Bri: Oh, they look like comfortable shoes.

Kids: Yes.

Bri: Have you ever noticed that people wear shoes but other animals don't really wear shoes? Have you ever seen an elephant wearing shoes?

[Elephant-like tuba music]

Kids: No.

Kids: No.

Bri: What about a horse?

Kids: No.

Yes.

Bri: Okay. A horse kind of does wear a sort of a shoe. A horse shoe. But it's not like a people shoe. What about a mouse? Does a mouse wear a shoe?

Kids: No.

No.

Bri: Well, four year old, Molly has been wondering about cats and shoes. And she has a question for us.

Molly: Why do cats don't wear shoes?

Bri: Yeah. Why don't cat's wear shoes? Do you have any ideas?

[Curious orchestral music]

Kids: Because they never go outside.

Because they don't wear shoes.

And the shoes are not the right size for them.

Because they're not like people, they have four legs and people only have two legs.

Bri: It could have something to do with the number of legs or maybe there's another reason. I think we could ask a cat expert. Someone who knows all about cats and the way they walk, and move, and how they behave. Oh, look, here she is right now.

[Door opens]

Joanne: Hi.

Bri: Hi. Come on in.

Joanne: Thank you.

Bri: This is my friend, Dr. Joanne

Joanne: Hello.

Bri: Thanks for walking all the way over here. Where did you walk from?

Joanne: From the University of New England?

Bri: Wow. That's a long way. Looks like you've got some comfortable shoes on though.

Joanne: Yes. Well, there are my comfortable brown walking shoes. I do a lot of walking and I need to have my feet as comfortable as possible.

Bri: Well, they look really comfortable. Joe, I have a question for you. Do you have a cat at your house?

Joanne: I have four cats.

[Cat meows]

Bri: Four cats.

Joanne: Uh-huh.

Bri: Do your cats wear shoes?

Joanne: No. They don't.

Bri: Why don't they?

Joanne: We need shoes, but cats don't need shoes.

Bri: Cats don't need shoes? How come?

Joanne: Cats have paws. And those paws are very useful for cats.

Bri: What do they use their paws for?

[Cheeky orchestral music]

Joanne: They use them to pounce. To run. To jump.

Bri: Have you ever seen a cat jump?

Kids: Yes. Once I was having breakfast and then the cat jumped up on the table and then, and then my bowl fell down.

Bri: So cats do jump. But Joe, couldn't they jump wearing shoes?

[Cat purring]

Joanne: Not really. Cats paws have pads on them. Big pad in the middle and then some smaller pads on the outside. And those pads are very soft but firm. So they help them if they're going to pounce, to jump, even climbing.

Bri: Climbing. Have you ever seen a cat climb?

[Fast playful strings]

Kids: Yes. My cat looks like black, she climbs.

Bri: How do you think they do all that climbing?

Kids: Because they have claws.

Joanne: Yes. Cat's claws are really, really sharp. Because the claws help them grab or grasp on things to climb. So tree trunk, or your curtains. Whatever they want to climb.

Bri: These cat claws sound pretty special. What do they look like?

Kids: Well, theirs, well they're black and pointy, bear claws. And they're very sharp.

Bri: Oo, those claws sound dangerous.

Kids: Scratch.

Bri: But why would a cat want to scratch?

[Busy wildlife]

Joanne: For a very long time, cats in the wild have had to find their own food. Like mice, rats, birds, and lizards, and the claws might help them grab the food that they eat naturally in the wild.

Bri: So cats need their paws and their claws to survive, to help them live?

Joanne: That's right. If cats had shoes on, they wouldn't be able to feel anything with their paws. They probably wouldn't be able to climb, or scratch, or grab anything. If a cat wore shoes, it would stop him from doing all of those things.

[Ballet music]

Bri: So Molly, the reason cats don't wear shoes is because they don't need them. They need their paws and their claws. And even if your cat eats ...

Kids: Cat food.

Kids: Little, little squares that are brown.

Bri: For thousands of years, cats have lived in the wild and used their paws and their claws to help them survive. That's pretty clever, even if cats today don't wear shoes. Could you imagine what would happen if they did?

Kids: She would fall.

She would like look, like, funny.

But if they wear the cat ballet shoes, they're like a ballerina. And try to tippy toe and then turn around, and then they'll fall on the ground.

They'll turn into a person?

Bri: Hmm. Maybe we should just keep the shoes on the humans. Have you ever tried to pounce like a cat? Do you want to give it a try? You need to put your hands and your feet on the floor and imagine that instead of your hands and your feet that you have paws like a cat, and get ready to pounce.

Bri: Imagine This is produced by me, Brianna Peterson, and is a co-production between The Conversation and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. For more episodes of Imagine This, plus a range of music and stories for young children, download the ABC Kids Listen app.