Why is it c in cat ... but k in kitten?

The most common spelling choice for the /k/ sound is the letter c but sometimes we need to use k.

There are some spelling rules to help with the correct choice for the /k/ sound:

1. If the next vowel is a, o or u, we usually use c.
   For example:
   - call, carrot
   - copy, colour (US - color)
   - cup, cucumber

2. If the next vowel is e or i, we usually use k.
   For example:
   - keep, kettle
   - kill, kitchen

There is a good reason for this rule: When c is followed by e or i, it will make the soft sound /s/ as in cent and circle. So, if you want the hard sound /kel/ or /ki/, you must use k.

3. If the next letter is a consonant e.g. r or l, we nearly always use c. For example:
   - crab, cricket
   - close, clap

For more on this spelling rule, please see Spellzone Unit 2 where you will find complete spelling lesson plans, extensive word lists, practice exercises, spelling tests and spelling games for ca/co/cu, ke/ki, cr/cl.