

Bringing **Animal Issues** Into the Classroom

Research and Discussion Topics for High School and College Students



- Describe differences between the fictional farmed animals we heard of as children (e.g., “Old MacDonald’s Farm” or Wilbur in *Charlotte’s Web*) and the animals on modern agriculture’s factory farms.
- Use a flow chart to illustrate how not spaying or neutering a cat or a dog can result in the births of thousands of kittens or puppies in a short amount of time. Include the average number of offspring per litter and the frequency of reproduction. Use these statistics to argue the case for spaying and neutering companion animals. (Suggested resource: HelpingAnimals.com)
- Find out the source of animals at a local pet store and investigate the number of animals raised by dealers and breeders to be sold in your area. Also, contact your local animal shelter and find out how many stray or abandoned animals are euthanized per year. Compare the data and formulate an argument for or against puppy mills and other dealers who breed animals to sell.
- Research the topic of animal behavior. Is there evidence that animals experience stress and depression? If so, what could be some causes? Give examples that would be true of companion animals as well as of other animals (such as those who live in zoos or circuses). Are there remedies?
- Evaluate how everyday speech (e.g., “chickening out,” “being a guinea pig”) can be a reflection of how we perceive the world and our relationship to its nonhuman inhabitants.
- Discuss the question “Is it ever acceptable to break a law (such as breaking into an animal laboratory and freeing animals) if there is proof that animals are being abused?”
- Choose an event involving animals, such as an animal rights demonstration, a fur fashion show, or a circus. Examine and compare several perceptions of the same event. For example, discuss a circus from the point of view of an animal rights activist, a circus trainer, a spectator, and an elephant. What motivates each?
- Research ways that humans have used animals throughout history that were later replaced with more modern and humane alternatives. For example, animal bones were used for tools, and elephants’ tusks were used to make piano keys—how were they eventually replaced? What other examples can you find? How are animals still being used today, and what alternatives can you suggest?

Note to Teachers

Using PETA literature, introduce students to animal rights issues. Encourage discussion in class, comparing older, widely held beliefs with a more modern understanding of our relationships with our fellow animals. Assign these ideas as essay or research topics or use them as guidelines for class discussions.



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- Examine the environmental impact of classroom dissection. What happens when a large number of animals, such as frogs, are taken from the wild? How are the animals killed? What chemicals are involved when the animals are “processed,” and how are the chemicals disposed of? Are the chemicals dangerous to humans? What happens to the animals after the dissection is completed?
- Identify famous people throughout history who were vegan or vegetarian. What reasons did they give for their choice? Are they based on compassion for animals? What other reasons might there be for choosing a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle?
- Compare the progression of the civil rights movement in the U.S. to the current animal rights movement. What methods did each use? What are the most effective methods of changing attitudes and traditions?
- Research the family and social structure and mating patterns of various animal species. Discuss the strong bonds present among members of many species (e.g., some animals mate for life, female elephants stay with their mothers for life, etc.). When humans disrupt these patterns (e.g., by capturing animals for use in aquariums, zoos, and medical experiments or by hunting), how are the animals affected?
- Some people say that animals are so much like humans that we must use them for medical experiments and even for organ transplants. On the other hand, they also say that animals are so unlike humans that they do not experience pain, loneliness, and sadness and that they have no souls, so they are not worthy of the same ethical consideration given to humans. Can both of these arguments be true, or are they contradictory? Debate the issue, or research and present your own conclusions.
- Research the origins of the practice of classroom dissection. How has the focus of science changed since then? Does dissection provide essential information that students need? If so, are there humane ways to learn it? Is there other information that you think is more worthwhile for students to learn?
- Investigate the sources of animals used for classroom dissection. Are they bred for this purpose, captured from the wild, stolen from families, purchased from a shelter, or a “byproduct” of the meat industry? Do their origins affect the ethical consideration we give them? Are some sources considered more acceptable than others? Why?



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