

Bringing Animal Issues Into the Classroom

Research and Discussion Topics for High School and College Students

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, following these guidelines. Then assign these ideas as essay or research topics:

1. Describe differences between the fictional farmed animals we were introduced to as children (for example, those in “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” or Wilbur in *Charlotte’s Web*) and the animals on factory farms today.
2. Use a flow chart to illustrate how not having a cat or dog spayed or neutered 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 having companion animals sterilized. (*Suggested resource:* HelpingAnimals.com)
3. Find out the source of the animals who end up at a local pet store, and investigate the number of animals raised by breeders to be sold as “pets” 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. Do you think it’s ethical to buy animals from puppy mills and other breeders? Why or why not?
4. Research the question “Is there evidence that animals experience stress and depression?” If the answer is “yes,” what could some causes be? Give examples that would be true of companion animals as well as other animals (such as those who are held at roadside zoos or forced to perform in circuses). Are there remedies for their stress and depression?
5. Evaluate how everyday speech (for example, idioms like “chicken out” and “be a guinea pig”) can be a reflection of our perception of the world and our attitudes toward animals.
6. Discuss the question “Is it ever acceptable to break a law (such as breaking into a laboratory and freeing animals) if there is proof that animals are being abused?”
7. 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 affects each?



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8. Research ways that humans have used animals throughout history that were later replaced with modern, 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?
9. Examine the environmental impact of classroom dissection. What's the result when a large number of animals, such as frogs, are taken out of their habitat? How are they killed? What chemicals are used to "process" them? How are the chemicals disposed of? Are they dangerous to humans? What happens to the animals' bodies after the dissection has been completed?
10. Identify famous people throughout history who are or were vegan. 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 lifestyle?
11. Compare the progression of the civil rights movement in the U.S. to the current animal rights movement. What methods have been used by each? Which of those methods have been the most effective in changing attitudes and traditions?
12. Research the family and social structures and the mating patterns of various animal species. Discuss the strong bonds that are present among members of many species (for example, some animals mate for life, female elephants stay with their mothers for life, etc.). When humans disrupt these patterns (for instance, by hunting animals or by capturing them for use at marine parks, at roadside zoos, or in medical experiments), how are the animals affected?
13. Some people say that animals are so much like humans that we must use them for medical experiments and even for organ transplants. But, they also say that animals are so *unlike* humans that they don't experience pain, loneliness, and sadness and that they have no souls, so they aren't 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 the topic and present your own conclusions.
14. Research the origins of the practice of classroom dissection. How has the focus of science changed since then? Does dissection provide students with essential information? If so, are there humane ways of obtaining it? Is there other information that you think would be more worthwhile for students to learn?
15. Investigate the sources of animals used for classroom dissection. Are they bred for this purpose, captured in their natural homes, kidnapped from their families, purchased from a shelter, or considered a "byproduct" of the meat industry? Do their origins affect the ethical consideration that we give them? Are some sources considered more acceptable than others? Why or why not?



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