

"Perspectives on Animals"

OTHER TITLE OPTIONS:

"Introduction to Animal Issues"
or "The Circle of Compassion"

GRADES: 7 - College

TIME: 45-60 minutes

MINIMUM REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- 1-2 large posters or several photographs as visuals
- Video - *Their Future in Your Hands*
- 2 milk crates or 1 bread crate
- Choices cards

Part One: Engaging Your Audience with Critical Thinking - Alien Visit to Earth

A. Warmly welcome your audience and introduce yourself and your purpose. Make sure that you are clear that your goal is to inform and inspire, not to tell people what to believe or do. You may want to let the students know that much of what they will learn from you is meant to be hidden and secret.

B. Alien Visit to Earth: This activity awakens students quickly, engages their minds, usually makes them laugh, and gives them a lot to think about through the remainder of your program:

1. Tell the students about your friend who is visiting, and who has been coming to schools with you to interview students. Let them know that she/he is different from other friends because she/he is an alien from another planet. You may give your alien friend the

gender and name you wish. For the following description, the alien is female. On her planet all beings are treated equally, and she is on a fact-finding mission to find out how different beings are treated on other planets. She is now visiting Earth. She is confused because there seem to be no consistent guidelines governing how to treat other beings here on Earth. Some life forms on Earth are protected and respected, while others are harmed and destroyed. While the alien is quite surprised by all the ethical discrimination and complexity on this foreign planet, the last thing the alien wants to do is to be a rude visitor who violates local customs. Therefore she needs people to be totally honest and clear with her. Ask the students if they would be willing to help her out. (We have never had an audience say no.) Explain that due to the difficulties of space travel, the alien does not travel in her body, and instead will occupy your body. When you close your eyes, the alien will take over your body, and when you open them, it is the alien who will be speaking to the students, although you'll be able to hear everything that is said. (Alternatively, you can bring a mask, leave the room, and come back with the mask on as the alien.)

2. The alien expresses awe at the size of the class, and looks warmly out at them. She confirms that the students understand her role and are willing to participate in her mission. The alien explains that understanding English can be difficult and requests that the students raise their hands when she asks them a question (this request also helps keep students from shouting out in general).

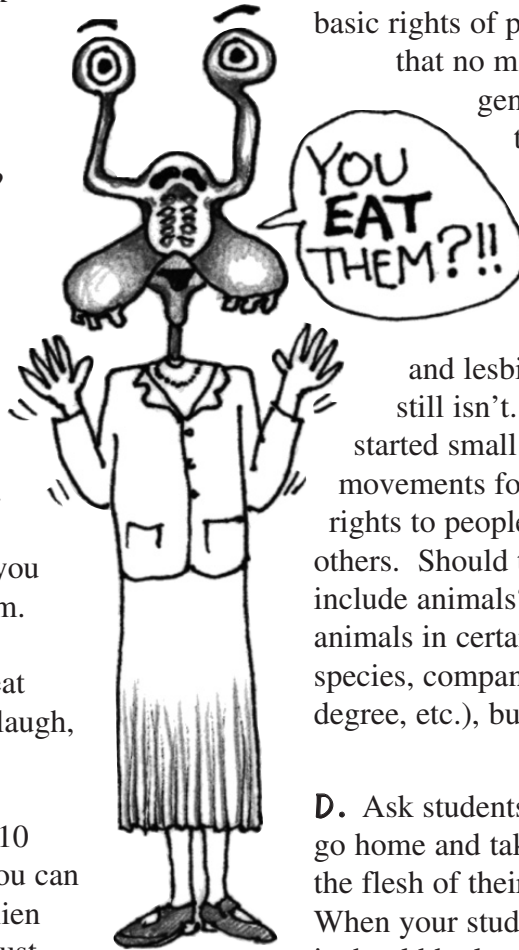
3. The questions: Essentially, the alien will ask the students questions, moving from questions about treatment of people to questions about treatment of animals. The basic format is "How should I treat _____?" The alien should also regularly ask for clarification by asking either or both of two follow-up

questions: “Why should I treat _____ this way?” and “Is it ever okay to cause harm to _____?” Some suggested questions follow:

- How should I treat human beings?
- How should I treat people with a different skin color or religion?
- How should I treat non-human animals, for example, birds?
- How should I treat a song bird?
- How should I treat a chicken?
- How should I treat a dog?
- How should I treat a pig?
- How should I treat trees?
- How should I treat fishes?

4. The students will likely tell you that you should treat animals with kindness and respect, just like people, but as soon as you ask about birds, the inconsistencies will pop up. Some will say to treat birds well, while others will tell you about hunting or eating them. This is your opportunity to respond with shock: “You eat them?!” The students will laugh, but they will also think.

5. Give yourself at least 8-10 minutes for this activity. You can end the activity when the alien gets so confused that she must depart. This leaves you, the visiting presenter, to talk about all the inconsistencies and issues that have been raised by the alien’s visit.



B. Place your two milk crates upside down on the floor next to each other, and ask the two volunteers to stand on them. Let them know that you’ll get back to them in a little while, and then proceed with your program.

C. Point out that we as a society recognize the basic rights of people from all walks of life, that no matter what color, religion, class, gender, etc. a person is, we accept that people should not be harmed or treated in a manner that violates their rights. It hasn’t always been this way, and in many places, and among some people, like gays and lesbians within our legal system, it still isn’t. The circle of moral concern started small and grew larger after a series of movements for social justice helped to extend rights to people of color, women, children, and others. Should the circle widen further to include animals? It already does include some animals in certain situations (endangered species, companion dogs and cats to some degree, etc.), but what about other animals?

D. Ask students whether it would be legal to go home and take a hot iron and press it into the flesh of their dog without painkillers? When your students say “no,” ask if they think it should be legal. When they say “no” again, tell them it is perfectly legal to do to other animals, and ask if they can think of which ones? When they say “cows” ask them what this is called (branding). You can make further comparisons as well. For example, it is illegal to place a pet bird in a cage so small the bird can’t stretch her wings, or to cut off two thirds of the beak of a pet bird, but it is perfectly legal to do to other birds (egg-laying hens and turkeys). It is illegal to go home and perform a home castration without painkillers or anesthesia on a cat, but perfectly legal to do to cows, pigs, and

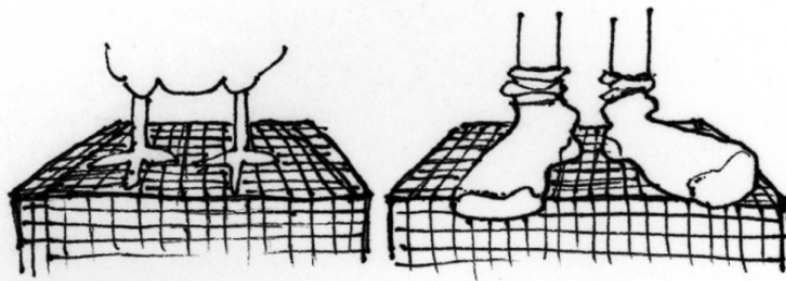
Part Two: Facts and Information - The Milk/Chicken Crates

A. After the alien departs, let the students know that you’ll be discussing the issues that came up. Ask for two volunteers willing to take off their shoes.

sheep on farms.

E. Discuss whether these inconsistencies reflect a prejudice.

F. Periodically check in with your two volunteers and find out how they are doing. They will likely tell you their feet hurt. When you feel they have had enough, (or when they ask to get off the crates), ask them how they'd feel about spending a year there. Assure them that you'll provide some sustenance through tubes each day, and that if they have to go to the bathroom, they can just go. The waste will fall through the holes in the crate. When they say they wouldn't want to spend a year, ask about a month, a week, a day, an hour. Put your arms on either side of them and remind them that they can't ever stretch their arms. Ask how they'd feel about each other. When you are ready to "release"



them, ask your audience for a round of applause.

G. Tell your audience that your volunteers were representing egg-laying hens in modern factory farms, and explain that over 95% of eggs in the U.S. are produced in this way. Explain that chickens raised under these conditions resort to cannibalism, and that the dominant chickens peck the weaker chickens to death. Explain that factory farmers cut off one-half to two-thirds of the hens beaks to prevent them from killing each other. Show a poster or enlarged photographs of these facilities. Allow the discussion to move toward explaining factory farming in general, and remind your audience that any of these cruelties would be illegal if done to pet dogs or cats (but not to dogs, cats, or other animals used in laboratories).

H. Show students a poster or photographs of chickens in battery cages, and ask them to notice ways in which the chickens look unhealthy or unhappy. Use pictures of other factory-farmed animals as well.

Part Three: Building Empathy and Concern

Video - *Their Future in Your Hands*

A. You may use any video here which you feel best helps the students understand the extent of animal exploitation. There are good videos for younger students, and many videos on specific issues (see resources section). *Their Future in Your Hands* is good because it is short, covers many issues, relates animal exploitation to human oppression, and ends by empowering viewers to make choices to help.

B. Make certain that you give the students plenty of time to discuss the video and share their feelings, either in pairs, or with the whole class.

Part Four: Teaching about Positive Choices

A. Ask students what products they used that morning to brush their teeth, clean themselves, etc. Write them down in columns on the board marked 1, 2, and 3. These represent "tested on animals," "not tested on animals," and, if you don't know, "don't know." Write down the products they tell you about in the appropriate column, and then tell them what each column represents, or ask them if they have any idea what the columns mean. Tell them that they're about to do an activity which offers information about choices we can each make if we decide that we don't want to use products that harm animals.

B. The Choices Activity consists of cards that have two choices, one on each side. For example the card may say “hamburger” on one side and “Veggie burger” on the other; or “conventional house” on one side and “solar-powered house” on the other; or “Tide” on one side and “Ecover” on the other; or “ice cream” on one side and “Tofutti” on the other. You can develop dozens of these cards, all representing a choice between two similar things.

C. Hand out the cards, either in small groups of 4-5 students, or to individual students if the class size is small. Ask students to decide which choice harms non-human animals less than the other, and why. (You might also want to invite students to think about which choice harms other people and the environment less.) Let them know they can ask you for help if they haven’t heard of a particular product.

D. After you’ve given the students time to go through their cards, ask them to share one card in particular with the whole class. If you have 5 groups of 5 then each group will share one card. Encourage them to share the reasons their group decided to say one activity or product harms less than its counterpart.

Part Five: Questions & Answers

If you haven’t given students the opportunity to fully ask questions during the program, now is your chance. Make certain that you stay open and loving to the students, even if some of the questions are hostile or make you feel defensive.

Part Six:

Inspiring and Encouraging Personal Change

Closing - Imagine a World

For a lovely closing for any class, ask students to close their eyes and to imagine a world that is different from the one in which we live. A world in which there is no racism, sexism, homophobia, or prejudice of any sort. A world in which there is no war, poverty, or starvation. A world in which the air is clean to breathe, and the fresh waters are clean enough to drink. A world in which all species are treated with kindness and respect. Ask students to make a promise to do one small thing to help bring about whatever part of this world is most important to them. Remind them to make sure their promise is small so they will keep it, and to remember that they can always make new promises. Ask them to open their eyes, and invite them to share their promises with each other in order to inspire and empower each of them.

Part Seven: Resources

Let the students and the teacher know that you are available to return to the class, to teach an afterschool class to students who want to form a group or club to address animal issues, and provide brochures, articles, etc. for them to take home after the program.