

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY

Learning area: English

Years: 4-6

Curriculum level: 3

Achievement Objectives

Students will:

- Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.
- Show a developing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.
- Select, form, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

Activity

Choose one figure from the list and find out a little about them. Ask students to write a short biography and list of major achievements, then to suggest why they may have concluded these ideas about animals. Many figures on the list were famous philosophers who made great contributions to human knowledge and ways of thinking – so it may be a surprise to read some of their less ‘humane’ thoughts! But these are often the corollary or knock-on effect of some of their most popular ideas, which shows that before you approve a perspective, you should consider all the avenues it might lead you down.

Learning area: English

Years: 7-10

Curriculum level: 4

Achievement Objectives

Students will:

- Show an increasing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.
- Show an increasing understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts.
- Select, develop, and communicate ideas on a range of topics.

Activity

Read the quotes from famous people about animal rights and/or welfare. Place them along a line which illustrates the spectrum of human-animal relationships, from “Animals are clearly inferior” on the left side, to “Animals are equal to people” on the right side. In pairs, students should choose one quote and brainstorm the pros and cons of this perspective, what it might lead to, and where this belief can be observed in action today.

Discussion questions

Which quotes do you identify with the most, and which quotes the least? Explain your reasons.

Why do you think attitudes towards animals have changed so substantially over time?

How do you think our view on animals will change in 20 years’ time? What about in 100 years’ time?

paraphrased quotations, which come from famous individuals who have influenced people’s views on other animals. Then complete the activities provided.

“Animals are thoughtless and can be compared to machines. They have no awareness or feelings.”

René Descartes, French philosopher, mathematician and scientist, lived 1596-1650

“I admit that animals can feel, but they are here for our own use and we can use them the way we want to. They are lesser than human beings and their feelings are not as important as the feelings of people.”

Baruch Spinoza, Dutch philosopher, lived 1632-1677

“There are heartless people who are dissecting dogs while they are still alive. Dissecting a dog would show that the animal has the same organs as a person, so of course a dog can experience the same emotions that a human being can feel.”

Voltaire, French writer, historian and philosopher, lived 1694-1778

“It does not matter how smart an animal is, what matters is that they can suffer, and that means we should not cause them harm or pain.”

Jeremy Bentham, British philosopher, jurist and social reformer, lived 1748-1832

“Nations that are kind to animals are more likely to be kind to people, and nations that are cruel to animals are more likely to be cruel to people. A nation that is kind to animals is morally more advanced than one that does not care about the welfare of animals.”

Mahatma Gandhi, prominent leader of the Indian independence movement, lived 1869-1948

“Animals have their own purpose for being and they are not here to be used and abused by people, just as black people are here for their own reasons and are not here to be used as slaves by white people, and just as women are here for their own reasons and are not here to be used as servants for men.”

Alice Walker, American author and activist, born 1944

“The idea that human life is sacred just because it is human life, and not the life of any other species, is very outdated and backwards.”

Peter Singer, Australian moral philosopher, born 1946

“People should not see different species as simply things to be used by humans. We must recognise that all species have value in themselves.”

Pope Francis, current Pope of the Catholic Church, born 1936

*Paraphrased quotations courtesy of Humane Education Advocates Reaching Teachers (HEART).

People’s feelings and attitudes towards other animals have changed throughout history. Show students the following