

Vegan Education in Schools

Ethics course

Years 7 to 12

Lesson 1: Introduction to veganism

Lesson overview: An introduction to veganism and its core principles

This 45-minute lesson introduces high school students to the core values and motivations behind veganism. Rather than focusing on animal welfare reforms, the lesson promotes an abolitionist view of veganism, rejecting all use of animals for human purposes. It explores the ethical imperative to respect animal autonomy, the environmental destruction caused by animal agriculture and the health benefits of a whole-food vegan lifestyle. Students will critically engage with visual media, challenge misconceptions and reflect on their role in creating a more just world.

Lesson objectives: What students will learn

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Understand the abolitionist definition of veganism.
- Identify the ethical motivations for being vegan and the associated environmental and health benefits.
- Critically evaluate mainstream myths about veganism.
- Reflect on the moral implications of using animals.
- Be inspired to question dominant narratives in society regarding food and animals.

Lesson outcomes: What students will be able to do

Students will be able to:

- Accurately define veganism and explain its principles.
- Articulate at least three distinct reasons and benefits for adopting a vegan way of life.
- Refute two or more common anti-vegan myths using factual information.
- Use multimedia and reflective thinking to engage in ethical dialogue.
- Produce a piece of creative or persuasive work expressing their views.

Lesson materials: Resources required for the lesson

- Whiteboard and markers
- Laptop and projector
- Speakers or headphones
- Internet access
- Printed copies of infographics and charts (optional digital display)
- Student notebooks or reflection sheets
- Links to all videos, articles and infographics (see each section)

Lesson steps: A breakdown of lesson activities

1. Warm-up activity (5 minutes): Engaging students and activating prior knowledge

Objective: Gauge students' prior knowledge of veganism and introduce the topic.

Activity:

- Ask students:
 - "What do you think veganism means?"
 - "What words or images come to mind when you hear the word 'vegan'?"
- Write their responses on the board.
- Briefly discuss the spread of ideas and clarify that veganism is not a diet or trend, but a commitment to non-violence and justice.

Supplementary teacher resources:

- [Why vegan](#) – Vegan Australia
- [What is veganism](#) – Vegan Australia

2. Core lesson content (20 minutes): Exploring veganism's definition, principles and motivations

Objective: Teach students the fundamentals of veganism using the abolitionist approach.

Part 1: Definition and principles (5 minutes)

- **Definition:** Veganism is defined as "a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation, of and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose". In other words, veganism is the idea that we should

avoid unnecessary suffering of animals, as much as possible. Whenever we are able to avoid harming animals, we should do so.

Veganism is the understanding that animals: value their own lives and bodies; have an interest in continuing their existence, avoiding suffering and seeking pleasure; and have the right to be treated with respect and justice and not as commodities or property. - Vegan Australia

- Explain that veganism is not a diet, but a commitment to non-exploitation.

• **Outline the main principle of veganism and some of the benefits of veganism**

Explain that the main principle of veganism is **to respect the autonomy and rights of animals by refusing to use them for food, clothing, entertainment, testing, or any other human purpose**. Veganism recognises that animals are sentient individuals - they feel pain and joy, form relationships and have a strong will to live. They are not here for us, and they are not ours to use.

Discuss some of the key benefits of living vegan, all of which begin with this ethical foundation:

- It prevents the needless suffering and death of billions of animals each year.
- It challenges the view of animals as property or commodities and instead affirms their right to freedom.
- It helps dismantle industries built on systemic violence, such as the meat, dairy and egg industries, the wool and leather industries and animal testing.
- It reduces the breeding and exploitation of animals in captivity, allowing more animals to live naturally or be rescued into sanctuaries.
- It sends a powerful message of empathy, justice and non-violence to others, inspiring societal change.
- It reduces deforestation, water pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss caused by animal agriculture.
- It can improve human health when focused on whole, plant-based foods.
- It supports a more just and sustainable world for future generations.

Question for discussion:

“Are there any other benefits of veganism that you can think of?”

Resources for this section:

- [Definition of veganism](#) – The Vegan Society
- [Why vegan?](#) – Go Vegan World
- [Animals are not ours](#) – PETA UK
- [The Environmental Destruction of Eating Animals](#) – Vegan Rising

Part 2: Reasons and benefits for being vegan (10 minutes)

- **Ethical:** Show side-by-side visuals of industrialised animal farms and animal sanctuaries. Emphasise that both images represent a response to human attitudes towards animals: use vs. care.
- **Environmental:** Use infographics comparing emissions, land use and water consumption of animal vs. vegan foods.
- **Health:** Share a chart showing high-protein vegan foods and their health benefits vs. saturated fat and cholesterol in animal products.

Discussion prompt:

- "Which of these motivations resonates with you most and why?"

Resources for this section:

- Sentient Media: [The Ethical Vegan Versus a Plant-Based Diet: What Is the Difference](#)
- Our World in Data: [Environmental impacts of food](#)
- PCRM: [Power Plate nutrition guide](#)
- Vegan Easy: [Why vegan](#)

Part 3: Addressing myths and misconceptions (5 minutes)

- Myth 1: "Humans need to eat a lot of protein to be healthy."
 - Show that humans need less protein than is commonly thought and that vegans can get plenty by eating a mix of lentils, tofu, chickpeas, quinoa, tempeh and leafy greens, while avoiding nasty cholesterol, saturated fat and carcinogens and getting beneficial fibre and phytonutrients.
- Myth 2: "Veganism is expensive."
 - Highlight affordable staples: beans, rice, oats, bananas, sweet potatoes, seasonal vegetables.

Resources for this section:

- [Top 9 Vegan Protein Sources](#) – Exploring Vegan
- [Vegan High Protein High Energy Diet](#) – Queensland Health
- [Vegan on a budget](#) – The Vegan Society
- [Nutrition FAQs](#) – Vegan Easy

3. Multimedia engagement (10 minutes): Reinforcing ideas through video and imagery

Objective: Help students visualise the reality and potential of veganism.

Videos:

1. [10 Billion Lives \(4:30 min\)](#)
2. [The truth behind the meat, dairy and egg industries \(11:50 min\)](#)
3. ["This Is Irreversible!" We Need To Take This Seriously! - Plant Based Science London \(2:16 min\)](#)
4. [The Game Changers trailer – 2:30 min overview of health benefits](#)

4. Wrap-up and reflection (5 minutes): Consolidating knowledge and encouraging future inquiry

Objective: Students consolidate what they've learned and reflect on how it connects with their values.

Homework: A creative or reflective task to consolidate learning

Task options:

1. **Design a poster** titled "*What veganism means to me*" using facts, drawings and messaging.
2. **Write a short reflection** (150–200 words) explaining their understanding of veganism and what they learned.
3. **Research and write about** a vegan role model (e.g., Dr Melanie Joy, Earthling Ed, or Sia) and their reasons for becoming vegan.

Assessment criteria: How understanding will be measured

Students will be assessed on:

1. **Participation and contribution:** Thoughtful engagement in discussions.
2. **Concept comprehension:** Clarity in explaining veganism's core principles.
3. **Critical thinking:** Ability to evaluate and respond to myths.
4. **Creative or written work:** Originality, relevance and evidence of reflection in homework.

Additional resources: Further exploration for students and educators

- **Veganism and ethics:** [Veganism](#) - Animal Ethics
- **Environmental impact:** [The environmental impact of raising animals for food](#) - Sentient
- **Health and nutrition:** [Nutrition Information](#) - Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine
- **Health:** [How animal foods assault our bodies](#) - Dr. Michael Klaper