

Vegan Education in Schools

Ethics course

Years 7 to 12

Lesson 12: Animals in entertainment - Exposing the exploitation in zoos, circuses, marine parks, racing and petting zoos

Overview:

This lesson provides a critical analysis of how animals are used in various entertainment industries including zoos, circuses, marine parks, greyhound and horse racing, and petting zoos. Through investigative videos and group work, students will uncover the reality behind these industries and learn why animal entertainment is incompatible with animal rights and sentient well-being.

Lesson objectives:

- To identify how animals are exploited in the entertainment industry.
- To explore the psychological and physical suffering inflicted on animals in captivity and performance.
- To challenge common myths used to justify these practices (e.g., education, conservation, tradition).
- To inspire ethical reflection and advocacy for alternatives that do not use animals.

Learning outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- Explain how and why animals are used in zoos, circuses, marine parks, racing, and petting zoos.
- Identify specific harms and ethical concerns in each industry.
- Critically respond to common industry justifications.
- Propose and support ethical alternatives.

Materials required:

- Projector or screen
- Internet-enabled devices
- Speakers or headphones for video
- Poster paper or whiteboard

Lesson structure and timings (45 minutes):

1. Introduction and discussion (5 minutes):

Write the question on the board:

“If animals are not ours to eat or wear, are they ours to entertain us?”

Invite initial reactions. Note key terms like ‘freedom’, ‘sentience’, ‘choice’, and ‘exploitation’.

2. Video and reaction (10 minutes):

Play or assign short investigative videos. Ask students to write:

- 2 facts they learned
- 1 emotional reaction per video

Zoos:

- [Why SHOULDN'T we support zoos and their conservation work?](#) - Earthling Ed

Circuses:

- [Casey Affleck Exposes Circus Cruelty](#) - PETA
- [Animals in the Circus: Hit, Bullied, Chained](#) - PETA Asia

Marine parks:

- [Blackfish - Official Trailer](#) - Blackfish
- [Why You Should Skip Marine Parks](#) - The Dodo

Greyhound racing:

- [Making a Killing](#) - ABC News
- [Australian Greyhounds Exported to Macau](#) - ABC News

Horse racing:

- [The Final Race: Investigating the Horse Racing Industry](#) - ABC 7.30 (Excerpt recommended: first 5-7 minutes)
- [Demolition Derby: PETA's Horse Racing Investigations](#) - PETA

Petting zoos:

- [Petting Zoos](#) - Animal Liberation
- [Undercover investigation reveals stressed animals in mall petting zoos](#) - Humane World for Animals

3. Group research task (10 minutes):

Split the class into six groups, each assigned one industry:

- Zoos
- Circuses
- Marine parks
- Greyhound racing
- Horse racing
- Petting zoos

Each group must:

- Identify 3 forms of suffering or restriction
- List 2 justifications made by the industry
- Write clear rebuttals from an animal rights perspective

4. Presentations and discussion (10 minutes):

Each group presents briefly (2 minutes max). Facilitate a class-wide discussion about:

- Common patterns across industries
- Impact on animal mental health
- The difference between *education* and *exploitation*

5. Ethical reflection (5 minutes):

Ask students:

- How would you feel in the animal's place?
- Are there some things that shouldn't be done even if they're legal?
- What does it say about society when we normalise violence as entertainment?

Invite written or verbal responses.

6. Call to action (5 minutes):

Highlight how students can take real-world action:

- Boycott animal-based entertainment (e.g., refuse to attend zoos, races or marine parks)
- Speak out at school and in communities
- Advocate for ethical excursions
- Share facts via social media

Assessment criteria:

- **Understanding:** Demonstrates knowledge of the key harms in each industry
- **Critical thinking:** Refutes justifications using ethical logic
- **Collaboration:** Participates constructively in group work
- **Communication:** Shares ideas clearly in writing and/or presentation

Differentiation:

- Sentence starters and captioned videos for EAL students
- Extension activity: design a public campaign or create a digital advocacy poster
- Creative alternative: create an artwork representing animal freedom

Homework (required):

Choose one of the following to submit by next lesson:

1. **Persuasive letter** to a council member, politician, or school leader asking them to end support for animal-based entertainment. Include:
 - Three harms
 - Two rebuttals to justifications
 - One proposed alternative
2. **Poster or social media graphic:**
 - Focus on one industry (e.g., horse racing or marine parks)
 - Include a powerful image or slogan
 - List 2-3 key facts
3. **300-word reflection:**
“What did I learn about animal entertainment, and what can I do differently?”