

Vegan Education in Schools

Ethics course

Years 7 to 12

Lesson 13: Animal experimentation and vivisection - Challenging the science, ethics, and justifications for using animals in research

Overview:

This lesson critically examines the widespread practice of experimenting on animals in scientific and commercial research. Students will explore what vivisection entails, uncover the physical and psychological suffering animals endure, analyse the scientific limitations of animal testing, and explore viable non-animal alternatives. The lesson highlights how deeply speciesism is embedded in research justifications and challenges students to consider whether science without consent can ever be ethical.

Lesson objectives:

- To define vivisection and identify where and why animal experimentation is conducted
- To explore the ethical problems of animal testing from an abolitionist vegan perspective
- To understand the scientific flaws and limitations of animal testing
- To identify animal-free alternatives and advocacy pathways for change
- To challenge industry narratives and assumptions about animal research

Learning outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- Describe what animal experimentation and vivisection involve
- Identify ethical and scientific problems associated with animal testing
- Evaluate arguments for and against the use of animals in research
- Propose alternative methods and articulate their benefits
- Engage in ethical reasoning and advocacy for non-animal testing models

Materials required:

- Projector or screen
- Internet-enabled devices
- Speakers or headphones
- Poster paper or whiteboard
- Student worksheets or notebooks

Lesson structure and timings (45 minutes):

1. Introduction and ethical warm-up (5 minutes):

Start by defining the differences between vivisection and animal experimentation.

Write this question on the board:

“If animals cannot give consent, can testing on them ever be ethical?”

Prompt student responses. Discuss the difference between testing on humans and animals.

Introduce terms like *consent*, *speciesism*, *rights*, and *utility*. Explain that today’s lesson will unpack the realities of animal testing and question whether it is justifiable in any form.

2. Videos and reaction (10 minutes):

Play or assign one or more of the following short videos. Students should write:

- 2 facts they learned from each video
- 1 emotional or ethical reaction
- [Testing 1...2...3](#) - PETA
- [Inside an Animal Laboratory](#) - No To Animal Experiments
- [Today’s Experiments on Monkeys Are Just as Cruel As They Were 70 Years Ago](#) - PETA
- [Save Ralph](#) - Humane World for Animals
- [Inside A Secret Lab](#) - Direct Action Everywhere (DxE)

3. Group task: Industry analysis and rebuttal (10 minutes):

Split class into four groups, each assigned a research category:

- Medical/pharmaceutical testing
- Cosmetics and household products
- Military and toxicology testing
- Academic and university-based research

Each group must:

- Identify 3 harms or stressors animals endure
- List 2 common justifications made by the industry
- Write rebuttals from an ethical and scientific point of view

4. Scientific limitations and alternatives (10 minutes):

Teacher-led section with visual aids or whiteboard notes. Cover:

- 90-95% of drugs that pass animal tests fail in human trials
- Interspecies differences make animals poor predictors for human reactions
- Notable drug disasters: *Thalidomide*, *Vioxx*, *TGN1412*
- Outline alternative methods:
- Human cell cultures and tissues
- Organ-on-a-chip technology
- Advanced computer simulations
- Volunteer microdosing

Emphasise that ethical and scientifically superior alternatives are increasingly available and must be funded and prioritised.

5. Class debate: Do the ends justify the means? (10 minutes):

Pose the question:

“If animal testing might lead to a cure for cancer, should it be allowed?”

Assign sides (Yes/No) and allow students to present quick arguments. Encourage rebuttals based on sentience, consent, rights, and available alternatives. Highlight that true ethics cannot be selective.

6. Call to action (5 minutes):

Provide students with ways they can take action:

- Choose animal-testing-free products and certified vegan products (look for leaping bunny or Vegan Australia Certified logos)
- Support organisations pushing for non-animal research methods
- Educate others on social media using facts and infographics
- Write to local MPs calling for greater investment in non-animal research

Assessment criteria:

- **Understanding:** Explains what animal testing involves and identifies key ethical concerns
- **Critical thinking:** Challenges industry claims and considers alternatives
- **Collaboration:** Works constructively in group discussions and tasks
- **Communication:** Clearly shares ideas and arguments in writing or presentation

Differentiation:

- Use captioned videos and provide summaries for EAL students
- Extension: Students can research a medical breakthrough that didn't rely on animal testing
- Creative option: Create an infographic comparing animal testing to animal-free alternatives

Homework (required):

Choose one of the following to submit by next lesson:

1. **Persuasive letter** to a cosmetics or pharmaceutical company, explaining why they should stop animal testing. Include:
 - Three harms
 - Two rebuttals to industry defences
 - One proposed animal-testing-free alternative

2. **Digital campaign poster** or social media infographic:
 - Focus on a real animal testing case (e.g., monkeys in neuroscience)
 - Include a powerful image and slogan
 - List 2-3 facts or statistics
3. **300-word ethical reflection:**
“What did I learn about animal testing and why does it matter?”