

## Vegan Education in Schools

### Ethics course

### Years 7 to 12

#### Lesson 15: Non-speciesist language and vegan-friendly idioms

##### Overview:

Language is not neutral. From idioms to everyday expressions, our words carry values and assumptions. Many of the phrases we use without question reflect and reinforce speciesism—a belief system that places humans above other animals and justifies their exploitation. This lesson exposes the hidden violence in our language, explores the cultural roots of speciesist idioms and terminology, and empowers students to create vegan-friendly and non-speciesist alternatives. Through critical thinking and creative rewriting, students will learn to use language as a tool for justice and liberation.

##### Lesson objectives:

- To identify idioms and expressions in the English language that promote speciesism or animal exploitation.
- To understand the philosophical and cultural implications of speciesist language.
- To analyse the role of language in shaping social attitudes and reinforcing systems of oppression.
- To develop and promote alternative expressions that are vegan-aligned, non-violent, and respectful of animals.

##### Learning outcomes:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Recognise the pervasiveness of speciesist language in everyday speech.
- Analyse how seemingly innocuous language can reinforce harmful ideologies.
- Demonstrate an ability to create non-speciesist and vegan-friendly alternatives to common idioms and expressions.
- Reflect on their own language use and adopt vocabulary that aligns with abolitionist vegan ethics.

### Materials required:

- Projector or screen for video and article visuals
- Printed handouts: list of common speciesist idioms and terms
- Worksheet for analysis and rewriting tasks
- Devices with internet access or printed copies of resources
- Whiteboard and markers
- Copies or links to the following resources:
  - [Removing Violence and Speciesism from Our Language](#) - UnchainedTV
  - [Animal-Friendly Idioms](#) - PETA
  - [Veganised Language](#) - Vegan FTA
  - [Non-Speciesist Language](#) - Animal Save Movement

### Lesson steps:

#### Step 1 - Provocation and awareness: The power of words (5 minutes):

Display an idiom like “There’s more than one way to skin a cat.” Ask:

- How does this make you feel?
- Would it be acceptable if it referenced a human instead of a cat?

Follow up with the question: “Can language be a form of violence?”

Introduce the terms **speciesism**, **normalisation**, and **linguistic violence**.

#### Step 2 - Mini lecture: What is speciesist language? (10 minutes):

Use selected quotes and screenshots from:

- [Removing Violence and Speciesism from Our Language](#) - UnchainedTV
  - [Veganised Language](#) - Vegan FTA
- Explain how language is a reflection of ideology:
- Idioms that involve harm to animals (e.g., ‘beat a dead horse’, ‘kill two birds with one stone’)
  - Terms that objectify animals (e.g., ‘livestock’, ‘it’ instead of ‘he/she’, ‘breeding stock’)
  - Food-based euphemisms (e.g., ‘veal’, ‘pork’, ‘meat’ instead of ‘baby cow’, ‘pig flesh’, ‘animal body parts’)

### **Step 3 - Group activity: Analysing the language (10 minutes):**

In small groups, students receive a handout with:

- 5 idioms
- 5 everyday terms related to animals  
They must:
- Define and decode each
- Identify the speciesist elements
- Consider what the language implies about animals
- Rewrite with a vegan-friendly or non-speciesist alternative

Examples:

- Bring home the bacon → Bring home the bagels
- Let the cat out of the bag → Spill the truth
- It (referring to animals) → He, She, or They
- Livestock → Farmed animals

### **Step 4 - Creative challenge: Language as liberation (10 minutes):**

Each group selects their favourite two rewrites and turns them into:

- A short social media post
- A slide for a class campaign  
Encourage students to create hashtags like #VeganVoices #LanguageMatters #SayThisNotThat

### **Step 5 - Class discussion and reflection (5 minutes):**

Ask:

- How does language shape the way we think about animals?
- What impact could widespread adoption of vegan-friendly language have?

### **Step 6 - Individual written reflection (5 minutes):**

Prompt:

“How will I be more mindful of the words I use? How can my vocabulary reflect my values?”

### **Homework:**

Create a two-part project titled **Rewriting the narrative:**

#### **Part 1 - Idiom transformation:**

Find three speciesist idioms not covered in class, research their meanings and origins, and propose vegan-friendly versions.

#### **Part 2 - Vocabulary makeover:**

List ten speciesist or objectifying terms (e.g., 'poultry', 'meat', 'it') and replace them with truthful, rights-affirming alternatives. Provide a one-sentence explanation for each.

Optional: Create a social media-ready carousel of your rewrites and reflections using Canva or PowerPoint.

### **Differentiation:**

- Provide visuals and simplified definitions for EAL/D students.
- Use sentence starters and templates for language-sensitive learners.
- Encourage deeper research into cultural language for advanced learners (e.g., examining Indigenous or other linguistic traditions for their views on animals).

### **Assessment criteria:**

- Quality of analysis in identifying and deconstructing speciesist idioms and terms.
- Creativity and logic in developing vegan-friendly alternatives.
- Active participation in group work and class discussion.
- Insightfulness in written reflection and homework.
- Evidence of alignment with vegan and abolitionist values throughout all tasks.