

Vegan Education in Schools

Ethics course

Years 7 to 12

Lesson 6: Abolition vs welfarism: Understanding the foundational divide in animal rights philosophy

Overview:

This lesson introduces students to the two dominant frameworks in the animal advocacy movement: abolitionism and welfarism. Students will examine how each philosophy approaches animal use and rights, evaluate the impact of different campaigns, and explore how veganism fits within a justice-based abolitionist approach. Through multimedia, critical reading, and reflection, students will gain the tools to understand and explain the difference between reform and liberation.

Objectives:

- Understand and define abolitionism and welfarism in animal advocacy
 - Identify how each approach treats the use of animals
 - Evaluate the impact and messaging of both welfarist and abolitionist strategies
 - Explore how abolitionist veganism connects with wider justice movements
 - Develop the ability to speak clearly and ethically about animal advocacy

Outcomes:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Accurately define and distinguish abolitionism and welfarism
 - Analyse advocacy campaigns through a justice-centred lens
 - Explain the risks of reform-based messaging
 - Articulate why abolitionist veganism offers a consistent ethical stance
 - Support their views using video and written resources

Materials:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Projector and speakers

- Internet-enabled computer or smartboard
- Printed handouts: definitions chart, campaign comparison sheet, discussion prompts
- Student notebooks or digital journals
- Access to the following digital resources:
 - Video: [Can't We Just Improve the Welfare of Animals?](#) - Earthling Ed
 - Video: [Why I'm A Vegan Against Animal Welfare](#) - Bite Size Vegan
 - Video: [Are You Advocating Cruelty?](#) - Bite Size Vegan (*optional extension*)
 - Video: [You Will Never Look at Your Life in the Same Way Again](#) - Earthling Ed (*optional extension*)
 - Article: [Abolitionist Animal Rights: Critical Comparisons and Challenges within the Animal Rights Movement](#) - Faunalytics

Lesson steps:

1. Introduction - Framing the divide (5 minutes):

- Begin with a class question: "If animals are still being used, is it really progress?"
- Introduce the core divide between abolitionist and welfarist approaches
- Write 'Abolition' and 'Welfare' on the board to track student input throughout

2. Video - Problems with welfarism (7 minutes):

- Play Earthling Ed's [Can't We Just Improve the Welfare of Animals?](#)
- Students complete a brief reflection sheet with questions:
 - What does Ed say about public perceptions of welfare labels?
 - How does welfarism create a false sense of progress?
 - What's the alternative?

3. Definitions - Clarifying key concepts (5 minutes):

- Provide or project definitions:
 - *Abolitionism*: A justice-based approach aiming to end all animal use; sees sentient beings as individuals, not property
 - *Welfarism*: Seeks to improve the treatment of animals while continuing to use them

- Quick class discussion:
 - How does each approach view justice and exploitation?

4. Case study comparison - Campaign messaging (10 minutes):

- In small groups, students analyse two real-world campaigns:
 - Welfarist example: “Ban cages for hens”
 - Abolitionist example: “End egg consumption - Go vegan”
- Students complete a worksheet comparing:
 - The campaign’s goal
 - Underlying assumptions
 - Ethical message
 - Likely public response
- Groups share summaries and contribute to board lists under ‘Abolition’ or ‘Welfare’

5. Reading and group discussion - Challenges and critiques (10 minutes):

- Students read excerpts from:
[Abolitionist Animal Rights: Critical Comparisons and Challenges within the Animal Rights Movement](#) - Faunalytics
- In pairs or groups, students respond to:
 - What are key values of abolitionist veganism?
 - What critiques does the article raise?
 - How can abolitionists remain clear, consistent, and inclusive?

6. Final video reflection - Speaking for justice (5 minutes):

- Play a short clip from [Why I’m A Vegan Against Animal Welfare](#) - Bite Size Vegan
- Class discussion:
 - What tone and logic does she use?
 - How does it reinforce abolitionist ethics?

Homework:

- Reflective writing (400–500 words): “Why is abolitionist veganism a consistent and justice-based response to animal exploitation?”
 - Must reference at least two resources from the lesson

Extension:

- Choose one:
 - Create an infographic, reel, poster, or short video explaining the difference between abolition and welfarism
 - Watch [You Will Never Look at Your Life in the Same Way Again](#) - Earthling Ed, and reflect: “How does this talk align with abolitionist values?”

Differentiation:

- Provide scaffolded worksheets, definitions, and sentence starters
 - EAL/D students may submit oral or visual work
 - Advanced learners may critique a high-profile campaign from an abolitionist perspective

Assessment criteria:

- Accurately defines and distinguishes abolitionism and welfarism
 - Engages in evidence-based analysis of campaigns and philosophy
 - Demonstrates understanding of ethical messaging in advocacy
 - Reflects critically on animal use, justice, and personal responsibility
 - Communicates insights clearly in writing, speech, or visual formats