

Vegan Education in Schools

Ethics course

Years 7 to 12

Lesson 8: Aquatic life and veganism: Ethical issues surrounding fishing, aquaculture, and the abuses in the "seafood" industry

Overview:

This lesson critically examines the exploitation of aquatic life, including fish, crustaceans (such as prawns, lobsters, and crabs), and cephalopods (such as octopuses) in the commercial fishing and aquaculture industries. Students will explore scientific evidence of sentience and pain perception in marine animals, challenge the speciesist assumptions that render these beings morally invisible, and dismantle industry myths around humane slaughter and sustainable seafood. The lesson culminates in a call to abolitionist veganism as a necessary stance of justice and non-violence that includes all sentient aquatic beings.

Objectives:

- To understand the scientific evidence for sentience in fishes, crustaceans, and cephalopods
- To analyse ethical issues in wild-capture fishing, aquaculture, and seafood commodification
- To explore speciesism as it relates to aquatic animals
- To examine and refute the myths of humane slaughter and sustainable seafood
- To promote abolitionist veganism as a consistent moral response to aquatic animal exploitation

Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Describe the practices and harms involved in commercial fishing and aquaculture
- Explain how fishes, prawns, crabs, lobsters, and octopuses experience pain and suffering
- Critically assess the concept of sustainable or humane seafood
- Understand and articulate the case for veganism as inclusive of aquatic life
- Produce written and/or oral reflections that incorporate evidence and ethical reasoning

Materials:

- Whiteboard and markers
- Projector and speakers
- Internet-connected computer or smartboard
- Handouts: terminology guide, myth vs fact sheet, reflection prompts
- Student notebooks or digital journals
- Access to the following resources:
 - Video: [Do Fish Feel Pain?](#) - The Humane League UK (4:51)
 - Video: [Seaspiracy - Official Trailer](#) (2.5 mins)
 - Article: [Do fish have feelings? Scientists believe they're getting closer to an answer](#) - The Guardian
 - Article: [Fish farming was supposed to be sustainable. But there's a giant catch](#) - Vox
 - Article: [Octopuses, crabs and lobsters to be recognised as sentient beings under UK law following LSE report findings](#) - London School of Economics
 - Article: [Eyestalk ablation](#) - Wikipedia
 - Video: [They Cut Shrimp's Eyes to Make Money](#) - The Dark Truth

Lesson steps:

1. Introduction - Who Do We Include in Our Moral Circle? (5 minutes)

- Ask: "Why do most people care about dogs but not fishes, prawns, or octopuses?"
- Brainstorm ideas around speciesism, appearance, cultural bias, and visibility
- Introduce the lesson focus: expanding moral concern to include all aquatic life

2. Fish sentience and suffering (6 minutes)

- Play video: [Do Fish Feel Pain?](#) - The Humane League UK
- Class discussion:
 - What does science say about fish pain perception?
 - How are fishes treated in the fishing industry despite this?

3. Industrial fishing - scale and secrecy (5 minutes)

- Ask: "How many fishes are killed each year globally?"
- Reveal: Estimates range from 1 to 3 trillion annually
- Show: [Seaspiracy - Official Trailer](#)
- Discuss:
 - What shocked you in the trailer?
 - Why is the reality of industrial fishing so hidden from public awareness?

4. Scientific evidence: fishes feelings and cognition (10 minutes)

- Read excerpt or summary from: [Do fish have feelings? Scientists believe they're getting closer to an answer](#) - The Guardian
- Small group discussion:
 - What behaviours or research suggest fishes feel emotions?
 - Why has the science been ignored for so long?

5. Aquaculture and crustacean abuse (10 minutes)

- Present information from:
 - [Fish farming was supposed to be sustainable. But there's a giant catch](#) - Vox
 - [Eyestalk ablation](#)- Wikipedia
 - [They Cut Shrimp's Eyes to Make Money](#) - The Dark Truth
- Class discussion:
 - What conditions do prawns and fishes endure in aquaculture?
 - What is eyestalk ablation and why is it done?
 - What ethical issues does it raise?

6. Cephalopods and legal recognition of sentience (10 minutes)

- Present information from:
 - [Octopuses, crabs and lobsters to be recognised as sentient beings under UK law following LSE report findings](#) - London School of Economics

- Discuss:
 - How intelligent are octopuses and similar species?
 - What does their legal recognition as sentient beings mean?
 - Why are they still unprotected from farming and slaughter practices?

7. Bringing it together - veganism as ocean justice (9 minutes)

- Lead reflection:
 - Why does veganism need to include fishes, prawns, octopuses, and other aquatic animals?
 - Can killing ever be humane? Is there such thing as sustainable exploitation?
- Exit quote on the board: "If fishes could scream, would we still eat them? Justice doesn't stop at the shoreline."

Homework:

- Reflective writing (400–500 words): "Why veganism must include aquatic animals: fishes, crustaceans, and cephalopods"
 - Must reference at least two lesson sources

Extension tasks:

- Design a digital poster or awareness video: "Fishes Are Not Food. Fishes Are Someone."
- Advanced: Research and present on the link between commercial fishing and modern slavery

Differentiation:

- Provide summarised versions of articles for students with literacy needs
- Allow oral/video responses as alternatives to written reflection
- Scaffold discussions with sentence starters and key vocabulary
- Extension tasks for advanced learners to explore intersectional justice
- **Assessment criteria:**
 - Demonstrates understanding of aquatic animal sentience and suffering
 - Critically engages with ethical and scientific texts
 - Challenges common myths and speciesist beliefs
 - Articulates an abolitionist vegan position inclusive of all aquatic life
 - Completes a well-reasoned reflective task using class materials