

Non-Speciesist Expressions

A vibrant green vine with heart-shaped leaves grows from the pages of an open, antique book. The book is resting on a large, moss-covered rock. The background is a soft-focus natural setting with green foliage and a stream.

A guide to idioms that respect the rights of animals

Non-speciesist expressions:

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Introduction: Why language is a battleground for justice

Language doesn't just describe the world, it shapes it. Every word, every idiom and every label we use either reinforces the status quo or challenges it. For our fellow animals, the status quo is a system of mass commodification, invisibility and violence. Language that objectifies animals, whether in the form of idioms, euphemisms or technical terms, is one of the most powerful tools normalising this system.

This guide is a call to consciousness. It is a resource for activists, educators, students and all those who believe in a more just and empathetic world. At its heart, this guide argues that language is not neutral. When we speak of animals as food, tools, objects or metaphors, we reinforce their oppression. When we challenge these expressions and offer new ones rooted in respect and truth, we begin to shift the narrative.

Many of the expressions we use daily, from 'bringing home the bacon' to calling animals 'livestock', carry the weight of centuries of domination. These phrases may seem harmless, but they serve to normalise violence and disguise reality. They desensitise us to suffering. They conceal slaughter with euphemism. They reduce living beings to commodities.

This guide offers alternatives: non-speciesist idioms that foster empathy and non-speciesist language that recognises animals as individuals with lives that matter. More than that, it provides critical context, helping us understand where these expressions came from, why they persist and how we can replace them with language that aligns with justice.

As we evolve as a society, so too should our language. This guide is an invitation to reflect on the power of our words and to choose expressions that align with values of fairness and respect. We do not seek perfection, we seek awareness. Every time we choose words that centre empathy, we dismantle speciesism one conversation at a time. Every time we help others see language differently, we open a door to broader change.

Together, let's use our words to build a world where animals are no longer hidden in our language, but recognised, respected and spoken of with the dignity they deserve.

How to use this guide

This guide is designed to be a versatile resource for anyone interested in adopting language which is respectful of the rights of animals. Here's how you can make the most of it:

(a) *Quick reference:*

Use the list (Section 3) to quickly find non-speciesist alternatives for common animal idioms.

Each entry includes the original idiom and its animal-aware counterpart.

(b) *In-depth learning:*

Explore the origins section (Section 5) to understand the historical context of these idioms.

The 'did you know?' facts provide interesting insights into each expression's background.

(c) *Practical application:*

Refer to the implementation section (Section 4) for examples of how to incorporate these new idioms into your everyday language.

Practice using the animal-respectful alternatives in various contexts to become more comfortable with them.

(d) *Educational tool:*

Educators can utilise the teacher's lesson plan (Section 7) to introduce these concepts in a classroom setting.

The plan includes activities and discussion topics suitable for various age groups.

(e) *Personal growth:*

Challenge yourself with the Reader's Challenge section (Section 6) to deepen your engagement with language evolution.

Use these exercises to develop your creativity and critical thinking about language use.

(f) *Gradual integration:*

Start by replacing one or two common animal-based idioms in your daily speech.

Gradually increase your use of animal-aware alternatives as you become more comfortable.

(g) *Conversation starter:*

Use this guide as a tool to initiate discussions about language, animal rights and cultural evolution.

Share interesting alternatives or origins with friends and colleagues to spread awareness.

(h) *Customization:*

Feel free to adapt the suggested alternatives to fit your personal style or regional dialect.

Use the guide as inspiration to create your own non-speciesist expressions.

(i) *Reflection tool:*

Regularly revisit the Introduction to remind yourself of the importance of empathetic communication.

(j) *Ongoing resource:*

Keep this guide handy as a reference for writing, speaking or whenever you encounter a speciesist animal idiom.

Consider it a living document and feel free to add your own notes or discoveries.

Remember, the goal is not to police language but to promote more mindful, inclusive communication. Use this guide as a supportive tool in your journey towards more empathetic expression.



Section 1: The problem with animal-based idioms

Idioms are more than colourful turns of phrase; they are cultural artefacts that reveal cultural values. When animals are used as metaphors for stupidity, violence, gluttony or expendability, we subconsciously view non-human animals as holding lesser moral value. The use of idioms such as 'beat a dead horse' or 'bring home the bacon' communicates that harming or consuming animals is culturally acceptable. These expressions are passed down through generations, normalising domination and exploitation.

Many of these idioms originated during times when animal exploitation was uncritically accepted and animal sentience was denied. Idioms like 'kill two birds with one stone' emerged from a period when hunting and animal farming were applauded and the value of non-human life was assessed as a means to human ends.

Today, we know better. Scientists along with animal liberation theorists affirm that animals are individuals with complex emotional lives and the capacity to suffer. As we evolve morally and culturally, our language must evolve with us. Continuing to use expressions that treat animals as commodities, tools or metaphors for human behaviour contributes to systemic speciesism and desensitisation. When we casually say, 'let the cat out of the bag', we're echoing historical market practices where animals were deceptively sold as hidden merchandise and recalling a time when deceiving others and treating animals as commodities were seen as things to laugh about.

These idioms are not neutral. They perpetuate a worldview that devalues non-human life. In a world trying to move toward justice, these phrases act like linguistic fossils, outdated remnants of a harmful ideology. It's time to unearth and replace them with expressions that reflect empathy, justice and truth.

We must ask ourselves:

- What does it mean when violence against animals is considered a metaphor for efficiency, foolishness or humour?
- How does this affect how we view animals in our daily lives and policies?
- Can changing our language lead to deeper systemic change?

Metaphors aren't decorative, they're cognitive tools. They shape how we regard non-human animals. When we reframe animals as worthy of empathy rather than mockery, we take a step toward a more respectful world.

Rewriting idioms isn't about policing language; it's about liberating it through intentional reflection.

This section informs readers of the normalisation of phrases and their origins, unpack their implications and imagine better ways to speak and live.

Section 2: The language of commodification

Speciesism does not always shout; it often whispers. It's encoded in our menus, textbooks, supermarket signage, job titles, government reports and dinner conversations. It hides in plain sight through euphemisms and terminology that function as a linguistic smokescreen. This is the language of commodification, a system of speech that turns someone into something.

Words like livestock, poultry and veal don't merely describe; they distort. They erase individuality, obscure suffering and sanitise violence. By referring to living, breathing individuals as meat, product or stock, we turn sentient beings into inventory. These terms make it easier for 'producers' and consumers alike to ignore their cries and justify their deaths.

This distortion isn't accidental, it is strategic. Animal agriculture, like all industries that depend on exploitation, relies on language to maintain public consent. For example, 'harvesting' is used to describe the slaughter of animals, as though lives were vegetables. 'Processing plant' conceals what is in reality a killing facility and was historically called a slaughterhouse, with the killing area referred to as the 'killing floor'. 'Culling' is often used to suggest population control rather than acknowledge it as mass extermination.

Even the pronoun 'it' contributes to this distancing. When we call an animal 'it', we linguistically strip them of identity, gender and personhood, reinforcing the belief that they are objects. Just as we reject calling humans 'it', we ought to extend the same respect to non-human animals.

Reclaiming accurate language is an act of resistance. It is the first step toward naming the reality of animal oppression and undoing the cultural myths that allow it to continue.

Consider the following comparisons:

Speciesist Term	Non-speciesist Alternative
Livestock	Farmed animals
Poultry	Chickens, ducks, turkeys
Meat	Animal flesh, pig flesh, cow flesh
It (for animals)	He, she, they
Breeding stock	Animals exploited for breeding
Veal	Baby cow flesh

Game	Animals killed for sport
Harvest (of animals)	Kill, slaughter
Seafood	Sea animals, aquatic life
By-product	Co-product of exploitation
Leather	Cow or goat skin
Down	Feathers violently plucked from birds
Fur	Skin and hair of killed animals
Processing plant	Slaughterhouse, animal killing facility, killing floor
Culling	Mass killing of sentient animals
Animal products	Animal-derived substances obtained by force
Animal agriculture	Systemic animal exploitation and slaughter
Carcass	Body of a slaughtered animal
Slaughter yield	Killing outcome or body weight post-death

More examples can be seen here - [The Rules of Veganised Language](#) (Vegan FTA)

Changing how we speak isn't just a matter of semantics, it's a matter of justice. When we reclaim words, we reclaim reality, and when we voice reality, we give voice to those who have been silenced by systems of profit and violence.

This section invites readers to pay attention to their daily vocabulary. What words do you use when referring to animals? What terms do you see in media, marketing and science? What would it mean to name these lives more honestly and more humanely?

Section 3: Non-speciesist idioms – rethinking everyday phrases through justice

Animal-based idioms often slip past our moral filters. They're catchy, familiar and passed down unexamined. Yet they normalise, violence, ridicule and exploitation, which is no longer acceptable in an age of awakening to animal sentience. When we say, 'kill two birds with one stone', we perpetuate the idea that efficiency justifies killing. When we say someone was like 'a lamb to the slaughter', we desensitise ourselves to slaughter.

This section includes 77 animal-based idioms that reflect a speciesist worldview and a list of creative animal-respectful alternatives. For each, we've for readers to generate their own version. This is not about being grammatically pedantic; it's about being ethically consistent. It's about replacing metaphors of death and domination with metaphors of empathy and life and dismantling oppressive linguistic structures.

Below is the full list of 77 idioms and suggested non-speciesist alternatives. Each has space for you to create your own version:

Original idiom	Non-speciesist alternative	Your version
Kill two birds with one stone	Feed two birds with one scone	
Bring home the bacon	Bring home the bagels	
Beat a dead horse	Stir cold porridge	
Pig out	Eat like there's no tomorrow	
Like lambs to the slaughter	Like leaves in the wind	
The straw that broke the camel's back	The can that toppled the stack	
More than one way to skin a cat	More than one way to peel a potato	

The elephant in the room	The billboard no one's reading	
Chicken out	Pause for thought	
Quit cold turkey	Quit straight away	
Let the cat out of the bag	Spill the sprouts	
Wild goose chase	A compass without a needle	
Running around like a headless chicken	Like socks in a spin cycle	
A fish out of water	Like origami in a storm	
Hold your horses	Tap the brakes	
Fat as a pig	Bloated like a baked loaf	
Cat got your tongue?	Mouth buffering?	
Cry wolf	False alarm	
A wolf in sheep's clothing	A butcher in a vegan café	
Kill the fatted calf	Crack the hummus lid	

Work like a dog	Grind like a coffee bean	
Go the whole hog	Turn the oven to max	
Barking up the wrong tree	Like zooming with the mic off	
As stubborn as a mule	Stubborn like a coach with one play	
Like shooting fish in a barrel	Like finding tofu at a vegan market	
You can't teach an old dog new tricks	You can't teach a boomer to TikTok	
Don't have a cow	Don't burst a bean	
Holy cow!	Holy guacamole!	
The lion's share	The biggest slice of the pie	
Mad as a hornet	Mad as a human behind slow walkers	
Get off your high horse	Mute your megaphone	
Like a bat out of hell	Like a cart with no brakes	
To badger someone	To spam their brain	

Sly as a fox	Cunning as a crooked politician	
Eager beaver	Enthusiastic person	
Busy as a bee	Busy as a barista	
The black sheep	The toast in the rice cooker	
Dead as a dodo	Obsolete as a floppy disk	
Curiosity killed the cat	Curiosity pulled the plug	
Watching like a hawk	Watching like a drone	
Quiet as a mouse	Quiet as a muted mic	
I smell a rat	Sniffs like clickbait	
Cold fish	Cold as a freezer	
A red herring	A clickbait curveball	
Early bird gets the worm	First spark starts the fire	
Bark is worse than bite	Thunder without the lightning	

Dog-eat-dog world	Swipe-right, stab-left	
The cat's meow	The tofu of trendsetters	
Ants in your pants	Too wired for stillness	
One-trick pony	Playlist with one song	
Birds of a feather flock together	Like seeds from the same pod	
Chicks before they hatch	Don't ice the cake before it's baked	
Hen-pecked	In a one-sided duet	
Dropping like flies	Falling faster than New Year's resolutions	
Straight from the horse's mouth	Fresh from the voice that lived it	
To have a cow	Went full drama download	
Bull in a China shop	Like a toddler at a crystal convention	
Sacred cow	Too holy to hold accountable	
No room to swing a cat	Like trying to yoga in a broom closet	

Until the cows come home	Till stars run out of shine	
Horse of a different colour	Same dance, new beat	
Putting the cart before the horse	Posting before proofreading	
Like herding cats	Like juggling jelly	
Taking the bull by the horns	Fronting the storm	
Like a deer in headlights	Centre stage with your fly undone	
Eat like a bird	Fork-shy	
Let sleeping dogs lie	Don't reboot old drama	
Snake in the grass	Ghost in the group chat	
To goose someone	Jab the timeline	
The pecking order	The power pyramid	
Chickened out	Ghosted the moment	
Cry over spilled milk	Cry over spilled coffee	

Packed in like sardines	Packed in like baked beans	
On a wild goose chase	Out chasing rainbows	
Ants in your pants	Pants on fire	
Walk on eggshells	Walk on broken glass	
Be a guinea pig	Be a crash test dummy	

This is not a definitive list by any means as there will be many more that need to be changed. The suggested changes here are just that ... suggestions. You may have your own ideas. There is no hard and fast rule. Be creative, be imaginative, be fun. Add your thoughts and create your own document to use. This is an important way to help you remember your own idioms and use them in your conversations.



Section 4: Implementation: Other examples in context

Moving from awareness to action is where real change takes root. Having explored the problems with speciesist idioms and discovered a wealth of creative, non-speciesist alternatives, the next step is to put these expressions into practice. Implementation is about more than memorising a list of phrases, it's about consciously weaving them into our daily speech, writing and teaching so they become second nature. By using these alternatives consistently and confidently, we not only shift our own habits but also influence those around us, modelling a language that reflects empathy, justice and respect for all animals.

New statement	Usage example
A cactus in a rainforest	At the black-tie gala, John felt like a cactus in a rainforest in his casual attire.
A little whisper told me	A little whisper told me that you're planning a surprise party for Sarah.
Angry as thunder	When he found out about the prank, Dad was angry as thunder.
As busy as a barista	Ever since the new café opened, Maria's been as busy as a barista during morning rush hour.
Beat a broken drum	I think we've discussed this enough. There's no point in beating a broken drum.
Bright-eyed and full of beans	Despite the early hour, the new interns arrived bright-eyed and full of beans.
Bring home the bagels	After landing that big client, Tom really brought home the bagels for his company.
Clowning around	The kids were clowning around in the backyard all afternoon.
Cry onion tears	Don't cry onion tears over the broken vase; I know you didn't really like it anyway.
Curiosity thrilled the mind	Don't be afraid to ask questions. Remember, curiosity thrilled the mind!
Cut two carrots with one knife	By carpooling to work, Sarah cuts two carrots with one knife – she saves money and reduces her carbon footprint.

New statement	Usage example
Diagonally across	The coffee shop is diagonally across from the library.
Don't count your seeds before they sprout	I know you're excited about the job, but don't count your seeds before they sprout. Wait for the official offer.
Don't have a meltdown	Don't have a meltdown! We can fix this problem if we work together.
Don't put all your berries in one bowl	When investing, remember, don't put all your berries in one bowl. Diversify your portfolio.
Don't question a gift's worth	When your aunt gives you a sweater, don't question a gift's worth. Just be grateful.
Drone's eye view	The architect provided a drone's eye view of the proposed building complex.
Drop and roll	In case of an earthquake, remember to drop and roll under a sturdy table.
Earth got your words?	Why so quiet? Earth got your words?
Eat like there's no tomorrow	At the all-you-can-eat buffet, Tom was eating like there's no tomorrow.
Garden party	For her bachelorette celebration, they threw a lively garden party with all her closest friends.
Get your rubber ducks in a row	Before the big presentation, make sure you get your rubber ducks in a row.
Go cold tofu	He decided to go cold tofu and quit social media entirely for a month.
Grab the rose by the thorns	If you want to succeed in this project, you need to grab the rose by the thorns and tackle the main issues head-on.
Hit the mark	Her presentation really hit the mark, impressing all the clients.
Hold your handlebars	Hold your handlebars! We need to wait for everyone before we start the meeting.

New statement	Usage example
In your dreams	You think you can finish this project in one day? In your dreams!
Inhale your veggies	Slow down! There's no need to inhale your veggies like that.
It's raining buckets	Don't forget your umbrella; it's supposed to be raining buckets all day.
Juice of the squeeze	The next morning, Tom reached for some 'juice of the squeeze' to cure his hangover.
Knocking on the wrong door	If you think I'm responsible for the mistake, you're knocking on the wrong door. Check with the marketing team.
Laser-focused	Thanks to her laser-focused attention to detail, Emma caught the error in the report.
Leaf on the vine	I wish I could be a leaf on the vine during their business negotiations.
Lead a friend to knowledge	I can lead a friend to knowledge, but I can't make them think.
Let settled dust lie	I think it's best if we let settled dust lie and don't bring up that old argument again.
Like a leaf in a whirlwind	On the day before the deadline, everyone in the office was running around like a leaf in a whirlwind.
Like a tornado in a paper store	Please be careful in the art gallery; don't be like a tornado in a paper store!
Like picking daisies in a field	For an experienced programmer like her, debugging this code is like picking daisies in a field.
Look what the wind blew in	Well, look what the wind blew in! I haven't seen you in ages!
Make a straight line	As soon as the door opened, the kids made a straight line for the candy aisle.
Money vampire	Stay away from that money vampire; he'll drain your savings with his predatory loans.

New statement	Usage example
No use crying over wilted lettuce	I know you're disappointed about not getting the job, but there's no use crying over wilted lettuce. Let's focus on the next opportunity.
On a mirage marathon	The faulty GPS sent us on a mirage marathon through the city.
One-hit wonder	Don't be a one-hit wonder in your career. Diversify your skills to stay relevant.
Open a jar of pickles	Be careful when discussing politics at dinner; you don't want to open a jar of pickles.
Packed like peas in a pod	During rush hour, the subway was packed like peas in a pod.
Put the cart before the tractor	Don't put the cart before the tractor by buying equipment before you have a business plan.
Raining pitchforks	Don't forget your umbrella; it's supposed to be raining pitchforks all day.
Sacred tree	In this company, the annual team-building retreat is a sacred tree that no one dares to question.
Seed money	They used their savings as seed money to start their new business.
Sense something off	I sense something off about his proposal; let's review it carefully before agreeing.
Spill the beans	I didn't mean to spill the beans about your surprise party!
Straight from the source	I heard it straight from the source – the CEO is planning to retire next year.
Summon the full orchestra	When their daughter returned from her year abroad, they summoned the full orchestra to celebrate.
Suck like a vacuum	After his marathon, Tom sucked like a vacuum at dinner, finishing three full plates.
Talk shop	Let's talk shop and get down to the details of this business deal.

New statement	Usage example
The boulder in the room	We need to address the boulder in the room: our project is way behind schedule.
The cherry on top	This new feature is really the cherry on top of our software update.
The drop that overflowed the glass	Being asked to work another weekend was the drop that overflowed the glass and Sarah decided to quit.
The early riser gets the prize	If you want to get the best deals at the farmer's market, remember: the early riser gets the prize.
The giant's portion	As the project lead, Sarah received the giant's portion of the bonus.
The odd bean in the bunch	In a family of doctors, Tom felt like the odd bean in the bunch with his passion for art.
There's more than one way to peel a potato	Don't worry if this method doesn't work; there's more than one way to peel a potato. We'll find a solution.
Throw to the wind	Don't throw your intern to the wind by making them present to the board without preparation.
Treadmill sprint	After 20 years in the corporate treadmill sprint, Marie decided to start her own business.
Veg out	After a long week, I just want to veg out on the couch with some snacks and movies.
Water off a lotus leaf	The criticism seemed to be like water off a lotus leaf for her; it didn't affect her at all.
When peas fly	I'll finish this project early when peas fly.
You can't reprogram an old computer	Don't say you can't reprogram an old computer! Grandpa just learned how to use social media.

Common Misconceptions vs Reality

Common Misconceptions	Reality
Changing idioms is unnecessary political correctness.	Language evolution reflects changing societal values. Just as we've moved away from racist or sexist expressions, shifting from animal-based idioms shows increased awareness of animal rights.
These new phrases won't be understood.	While new expressions may take time to catch on, clear context and consistent usage can quickly integrate them into everyday language. Many of our alternatives are self-explanatory.
Speciesist animal idioms don't actually harm animals.	While not directly harmful, these expressions can reinforce a mindset that views animals as commodities or tools, potentially influencing broader attitudes and behaviours towards animals.
Vegan language is only for vegans.	More empathetic language benefits everyone by promoting mindfulness and empathy. It's not about restricting speech but expanding our expressive options.
Changing idioms erases cultural heritage.	Language is constantly evolving. These new expressions add to our linguistic heritage rather than erasing it, reflecting our growing understanding of animal sentience.
It's impossible to eliminate all animal references from language.	The goal isn't to eliminate all animal references, but to avoid expressions that normalise harm or exploitation of animals. Neutral or positive animal references can remain.
These new idioms aren't as impactful or colourful.	Many of our alternatives are equally vivid and memorable. Creativity in language often leads to more impactful expressions.
People won't make the effort to change their speech habits.	Many people are open to positive change when they understand the reasoning. Small, gradual changes in everyday speech can lead to significant shifts over time.

Common Misconceptions	Reality
Focusing on language distracts from 'real' animal rights issues.	Language shapes thought, which in turn influences action. Addressing how we speak about animals is part of a holistic approach to increasing understanding of animal rights.
Once you start, you'll have to change everything.	The aim is to move towards language that respects the rights of animals. This may take time, but the goal is more mindful and inclusive communication.

By addressing these misconceptions, we can foster a more nuanced understanding of why and how we're suggesting these language changes, encouraging more open-minded adoption of non-speciesist expressions.

Tips for incorporating new idioms

1. Start gradually:

Begin by replacing one or two common animal-based idioms in your daily speech. As you become more comfortable, gradually increase your use of animal-respectful alternatives.

2. Context is key:

When using a new idiom, ensure the context clearly conveys your meaning. If necessary, briefly explain the new phrase the first time you use it.

3. Be consistent:

Once you've adopted a new idiom, use it consistently. Repetition will help others understand and potentially adopt the expression themselves.

4. Use analogies:

When introducing a new idiom, draw parallels to the original expression to help others understand. For example, instead of saying 'kill two birds with one stone,' I now say, 'cut two carrots with one knife' – it means the same thing!

5. Lead by example:

Use the new idioms in your writing and speech without drawing excessive attention to them. Natural usage can normalise these expressions over time.

6. Be patient:

Remember that language change takes time. Don't be discouraged if others don't immediately adopt or understand the new expressions.

7. Explain when asked:

If someone asks about your use of an unusual phrase, take it as an opportunity to explain the reasoning behind non-speciesist language.

8. Tailor to your audience:

Consider your audience when using new idioms. In more formal or professional settings, you might need to use more widely recognised expressions initially.

9. Create memorable associations:

Try to create mental images or stories that link the new idiom to its meaning, making it more memorable for yourself and others.

10. Use in writing:

Incorporate these new idioms in your emails, social media posts or other written communications to expose more people to these alternatives.

11. Practice active listening:

Pay attention to the animal-based idioms others use. This awareness will help you identify opportunities to use non-speciesist alternatives in your responses.

12. Create personal variations:

Feel free to create your own variations of these idioms that feel natural to you, as long as they respect the rights of animals.

13. Use humour:

Don't be afraid to use these new idioms in a light-hearted way. Humour can make the transition to new expressions more enjoyable and memorable.

14. Reinforce with visual aids:

In presentations or social media, consider using images that represent the new idioms to help reinforce their meanings.

15. Be open to feedback:

Listen to how others respond to your use of new idioms. Their reactions can help you refine your approach and choose the most effective alternatives.

Keep in mind, the aim is to make your language more inclusive and empathetic. With time and practice, these new idioms will become a natural part of your vocabulary.

Section 5: Origins

Did you know? Facts – Historical context of animal-based idioms

Idiom	Did you know?
A fish out of water	This idiom has been in use since at least the 1300s, appearing in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.
A little bird told me	This phrase might have biblical origins, referring to Ecclesiastes 10:20, which warns that a bird might carry your words to others.
As busy as a bee	Bees have been symbols of industry and busyness since ancient times, appearing in both Egyptian hieroglyphs and Greek mythology.
Barking up the wrong tree	This phrase likely comes from hunting with dogs, where a dog might mistakenly bark at a tree where she falsely believes her prey is hiding.
Beat a dead horse	This expression likely comes from the 19th century when the practice of beating horses to make them go faster was common, even if the horse had collapsed from exhaustion.
Bird's eye view	This term has been in use since the 1600s, long before humans could actually see from a bird's perspective through flight or aerial photography.
Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed	This phrase, meaning alert and energetic, likely comes from observations of squirrels, who appear alert with their eyes wide and tails up.
Bring home the bacon	This phrase might come from a 12th-century church in England that offered a side of bacon to any man who could swear he hadn't argued with his wife for a year and a day!
Cat got your tongue?	Some theories suggest it came from ancient Egypt, where tongues were sometimes cut out and fed to cats as punishment, or from the English navy, where the cat-o'-nine-tails whip could render sailors speechless.
Cry crocodile tears	Ancient Greek historian Plutarch perpetuated the myth that crocodiles cry while eating their prey, giving rise to this idiom for insincere displays of emotion.

Idiom	Did you know?
Curiosity killed the cat	The original version of this proverb was Care killed the cat, where 'care' meant worry or sorrow, not curiosity. It changed over time to its current form.
Don't count your chickens before they hatch	This wisdom dates back to Aesop's fables, specifically The Milkmaid and Her Pail, written around 600 BCE.
Don't have a cow	This informal phrase for don't overreact became popular in the 1950s and was later popularised by the character Bart Simpson.
Don't look a gift horse in the mouth	This phrase comes from the practice of determining a horse's age by looking at his teeth, suggesting it's rude to examine a gift too closely. The phrase has roots in Latin and is believed to have been used by St. Jerome in the 4th century
Don't put all your eggs in one basket	This proverb can be traced back to Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes, published in 1605, emphasizing the timeless nature of this advice.
Duck and cover	This phrase became widely known in the 1950s as part of a U.S. Civil Defence campaign to prepare for nuclear attack.
Eagle-eyed	Eagles can see four to eight times farther than humans and can spot a rabbit from two miles away, making them a perfect metaphor for keen vision.
Eat like a horse	Horses can eat up to 2% of their body weight daily, which for a 1000-pound horse is 20 pounds of food!
Eat like a pig	This phrase reflects the misconception that pigs are messy eaters. In reality, pigs are relatively tidy eaters compared to many animals.
Fly on the wall	This idiom became popular in the mid-20th century, coinciding with the rise of surveillance technology and reality TV concepts.
Get your ducks in a row	While the origin is debated, one theory suggests it comes from the game of bowling, where pins were sometimes called ducks.
Go cold turkey	The origin is unclear, but one theory suggests it comes from the cold, clammy skin that addicts experience during withdrawal, resembling a plucked turkey.

Idiom	Did you know?
Hair of the dog	This phrase comes from the old belief that a cure for rabies was to place hair from the dog who bit you into the wound.
Hen party	This term for a bachelorette party originated in the 1800s, possibly referencing how a group of women might cackle and chatter like hens.
Hit the bull's-eye	The bull's-eye was originally the centre of a target in archery, later adopted in darts. The term dates back to the 16th century.
Hold your horses	This phrase originated from the need to control and slow down horses during activities like riding and chariot races. It's a very old phrase, with possible origins traced back to Homer's Iliad.
Horsing around	This phrase, meaning to play roughly, likely comes from observations of horses playing and frolicking in fields.
In a pig's eye	This expression possibly started because a pig's eyes are small. If you were trying to shoot something and got it very close to the target, it would be unbelievable that the shot was made since the target was so small.
It's raining cats and dogs	While the origin is unclear, one theory suggests it comes from Norse mythology where Odin, God of storms, was often depicted with dogs and wolves, symbols of the wind.
Kill the fatted calf	This phrase comes from the biblical parable of the Prodigal Son, where a fatted calf is prepared to celebrate the son's return.
Kill two birds with one stone	This phrase likely originated from the ancient sport of stone-throwing at birds, highlighting how our language often reflects outdated practices.
Kitty corner	This phrase is actually a corruption of cater-corner, from the French quatre meaning four, referring to the four corners of a square.
Lead a horse to water	This proverb, meaning you can't force someone to do something they don't want to, dates back to 12th century England.
Let sleeping dogs lie	This saying has been traced back to Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde in the 14th century, advising against stirring up trouble.

Idiom	Did you know?
Let the cat out of the bag	One theory suggests this phrase comes from the medieval practice of substituting a cat for a piglet in a bag at markets, revealing the trick if the cat escaped.
Like a bull in a China shop	This idiom is believed to have originated in 17th century London, where farmed animals brought to be sold sometimes escaped and entered nearby China shops, causing a great deal of damage.
Like a chicken with its head cut off	This violent idiom comes from the fact that chickens can indeed run around for a short time after decapitation due to reflexes in their nervous system.
Like shooting fish in a barrel	Prior to the modern days of refrigeration, fish were packed and stored in large barrels. The barrels were packed to the rim full of fish.
Lion's share	This phrase comes from Aesop's fable where a lion claims all of a hunt's spoils, demonstrating the idea that the powerful take the largest portion.
Loan shark	This term for a predatory lender comes from the way sharks circle their prey, similar to how these lenders circle vulnerable borrowers.
Look what the cat dragged in	This informal greeting refers to how cats often bring dead animals as 'gifts' to their owners, a behaviour rooted in their instinct to teach hunting.
Mad as a hornet	Hornets are known for their aggressive behaviour when their nests are disturbed, making them an apt metaphor for extreme anger.
Make a beeline	This phrase comes from the belief that bees fly in a straight line back to their hive after collecting nectar, though we now know their flight paths are more complex.
Monkey see, monkey do	This phrase likely originated in the 1920s and reflects the human tendency to imitate others' behaviour without understanding why.
Nest egg	This term for savings comes from the practice of placing a fake egg in a hen's nest to encourage her to lay more eggs.

Idiom	Did you know?
No use crying over spilled milk	This proverb about not lamenting things that can't be changed dates back to the 1600s in England.
One trick pony	This phrase originated in the 19th-century circus, referring to an act where a pony would perform only one trick.
Open a can of worms	This phrase likely originated in the 1950s when canned worms became popular for fishing bait and opening the can would cause a messy, hard-to-control situation.
Packed like sardines	This simile refers to how tightly sardines are packed in cans, a preservation method that became popular in the 19th century.
Pig out	This informal phrase became popular in the 1960s, likely derived from the stereotype of pigs as voracious eaters.
Put the cart before the horse	This illogical scenario has been used as a metaphor for doing things in the wrong order since at least the 1500s.
Rats leaving a sinking ship	This phrase comes from the observation that rats often flee ships in distress, becoming a metaphor for people abandoning a failing enterprise.
Red herring	This term for a misleading clue dates back to a 19th-century practice of using smoked herring to train hunting dogs, distracting them from their real prey.
Sick as a dog	This phrase likely comes from the idea that dogs often get sick from eating things they shouldn't, leading to intense illness.
Straight from the horse's mouth	This phrase comes from horse trading, where checking a horse's teeth (in their mouth) was the best way to verify their age and health.
Take the bull by the horns	This phrase, meaning to face a difficult situation head-on, may come from rodeo culture or ancient bullfighting practices.
The cat's pyjamas	This phrase was popularised in the 1920s as slang for something or someone considered excellent or outstanding.
The whole hog	This idiom likely comes from the practice of buying a whole pig at market, rather than just a portion, meaning to go all the way.

Idiom	Did you know?
Till the cows come home	Cows are known to take their time returning from pasture, making this a metaphor for something that takes a very long time to happen.
Top dog	This term for the most successful or dominant person or entity may come from the world of dogfighting, where the winning dog was literally on top.
Watch like a hawk	Hawks have exceptional vision, able to spot small prey from great distances, making them a fitting metaphor for close observation.
White elephant	This term for something costly yet useless comes from the historical practice of Southeast Asian monarchs gifting rare albino elephants, who were considered sacred but expensive to maintain.
Wolf in sheep's clothing	This phrase has its origins in the Bible, specifically in the Gospel of Matthew, warning against false prophets who disguise themselves as harmless.
You can't teach an old dog new tricks	This proverb, meaning it's hard to change established habits, dates back to a 16th-century book of proverbs by John Fitzherbert.



Section 6: Reader's challenge

- Idiom invention: Can you create a non-speciesist alternative for 'put all your eggs in one basket'? Share your ideas on social media using #VeganExpressions!
- Context creation: Write a short paragraph using at least three of our non-speciesist idioms. How naturally can you incorporate them into everyday language?
- Origin story: Invent a creative (and fictional) origin story for one of our new non-speciesist idioms. For example, where might 'cut two carrots with one knife' have come from?
- Idiom evolution: Choose a speciesist animal idiom not on our list and create your own animal-respectful alternative. Explain your reasoning for the new phrase.
- Cultural exchange: Research an idiom from another language that uses animal references. How would you translate its meaning into English and make it non-speciesist?
- Artistic interpretation: Draw or describe an image that represents one of our new non-speciesist idioms literally. How does visualizing it change your perception of the phrase?
- Situation swap: Think of a recent situation where you used a speciesist animal idiom. How could you rephrase it using one of our new expressions?
- Idiom chain: Start with one of our non-speciesist idioms and create a short story where each sentence includes a different idiom from our list. How many can you use coherently?
- Professional makeover: Choose a profession and identify common animal-based idioms used in that field. How could you rewrite the jargon to be non-speciesist?
- Comparative analysis: Pick a speciesist animal idiom and its non-speciesist alternative. Discuss how the meaning or connotation might subtly change with the new version. Does it enhance or alter the original message?
- Future forecast: Imagine a world 100 years from now. What new idioms might exist then, based on current trends and technologies? How might they replace some of our current animal-based expressions?
- Idiom mash-up: Combine two of our non-speciesist idioms to create a new, more complex expression. Explain what your new super idiom might mean.

It's important to focus on these challenges and to engage creatively with language, promoting more mindful and inclusive communication. Share your results with friends or on social media to spread awareness about language which is respectful of the rights of animals!



Section 7: Teacher's lesson plans

This plan will be suitable for middle to high school students (ages 13-18) and could be adapted for younger or older students as needed.

Title: Exploring and creating non-speciesist expressions: A journey into animal-respectful idioms

Target age range: 13-18 years old (Grades 8-12)

Total lessons: 5 (45-60 minutes each)

Overall objectives:

- Understand the concept of idioms and their role in language
- Recognise how language reflects cultural values and attitudes
- Develop critical thinking skills about the use of negative animal references in everyday language
- Create and use animal-respectful alternatives to common animal-based idioms
- Enhance creative writing and language skills

Lesson 1: Introduction to idioms and language evolution

Objectives:

- Define and identify idioms
- Understand how language evolves over time
- Introduce the concept of animal-based idioms

Activities:

1. Warm-up (10 minutes): Play Guess the Idiom game using common expressions
2. Lecture (15 minutes): Define idioms, explain their purpose in language, discuss language evolution
3. Group Activity (15 minutes): In small groups, students list as many animal-based idioms as they can think of
4. Discussion (10 minutes): Share findings, discuss why animals feature prominently in idioms
5. Homework: Research the origin of one animal-based idiom

Additional activities:

6. Etymology Exploration (10 minutes): Introduce students to etymology resources and demonstrate how to research the origins of idioms.

7. Idiom Categories (10 minutes): Introduce different categories of idioms (e.g., body parts, colours, nature) and have students categorise the animal-based idioms they've listed.

Extended homework: Research the origin of one animal-based idiom and one non-animal-based idiom. Compare and contrast their origins and usage over time.



Lesson 2: The impact of language on perception

Objectives:

- Analyse how language influences thought and behaviour
- Explore the concept of speciesism in language
- Introduce animal-respectful alternatives to animal-based idioms

Activities:

1. Warm-up (10 minutes): Students share their idiom origin research
2. Lecture (15 minutes): Discuss how language shapes perception, introduce concept of speciesism
3. Activity (20 minutes): Provide list of animal-based idioms and non-speciesist alternatives. Students discuss in pairs how the meaning changes (or doesn't) with the new versions
4. Class discussion (10 minutes): Share insights, discuss the importance of mindful language use
5. Homework: Choose three animal-based idioms and create animal-respectful alternatives

Additional activities:

6. Media analysis (15 minutes): Provide examples of animal-based idioms in media (news articles, advertisements, social media posts). Discuss how these phrases might influence readers' perceptions.
7. Cultural comparison (10 minutes): Explore animal-based idioms from different cultures and languages. Discuss how cultural differences affect idiom usage and perception.

Extended homework:

Interview a family member or friend about their use of animal-based idioms. Write a short report on their perspective and your reflections.

Lesson 3: Creative writing with non-speciesist idioms

Objectives:

- Apply non-speciesist idioms in creative writing
- Develop skills in context-appropriate language use

Activities:

1. Warm-up (10 minutes): Students share their non-speciesist idiom creations
2. Mini-lesson (10 minutes): Tips for incorporating idioms naturally in writing
3. Writing activity (25 minutes): Students write a short story or dialogue incorporating at least five non-speciesist idioms
4. Peer review (10 minutes): In pairs, students read and provide feedback on each other's writing
5. Homework: Revise the story based on peer feedback

Additional activities:

6. Idiom illustration (15 minutes): Students create visual representations of their favourite non-speciesist idioms.
7. Genre challenge (20 minutes): Students write short pieces in different genres (e.g., mystery, romance, sci-fi) incorporating non-speciesist idioms.

Extended homework:

Create a social media post or short blog entry using at least three non-speciesist idioms to raise awareness about empathetic language.

Lesson 4: Debating language change

Objectives:

- Critically analyse arguments for and against changing idiomatic expressions
- Develop persuasive speaking and listening skills

Activities:

1. Warm-up (10 minutes): Quick write - Should we actively try to change the idioms we use? Why or why not?
2. Preparation (15 minutes): Divide class into two groups - one arguing for changing animal-based idioms, one against. Groups prepare their arguments
3. Debate (20 minutes): Structured debate between the two sides
4. Reflection (10 minutes): Class discussion on what they learned from the debate
5. Homework: Write a reflection paragraph on their personal stance after the debate

Additional activities:

6. Historical context (15 minutes): Discuss historical examples of language change (e.g., gender-neutral language, racial terminology) and draw parallels to animal-based idioms.
7. Role-play (20 minutes): Students act out scenarios where they explain their use of non-speciesist idioms to confused listeners.

Extended homework:

Research a public figure or organisation that has made efforts to use more inclusive language. Analyse their approach and its effectiveness.

Lesson 5: Creating a non-speciesist expression guide

Objectives:

- Synthesise learning from previous lessons
- Collaborate on a practical application of non-speciesist idioms

Activities:

1. Warm-up (5 minutes): Recap key points from previous lessons
2. Project introduction (10 minutes): Explain the project - creating a class guide to animal-respectful expressions
3. Group work (30 minutes): In small groups, students compile their favourite non-speciesist idioms, create new ones and prepare explanations and example uses
4. Presentation prep (10 minutes): Groups prepare to present their contributions
5. Homework: Finalise group contributions for presentation next class

Additional activities:

6. Peer review workshop (20 minutes): Groups exchange their draft guides and provide constructive feedback.
7. Marketing strategy (15 minutes): Groups develop a plan to promote their guide within the school or local community.

Follow-up:

- Groups present their contributions
- Compile all contributions into a class non-speciesist expressions guide
- Optional: Create posters or social media content to share their new idioms

Extended follow-up:

- Organise a school-wide Non-speciesist Language Day where students and staff are encouraged to use non-speciesist idioms.
- Create a digital version of the guide to share on the school website or social media platforms.

Assessment ideas:

- Participation in class discussions and activities
- Creative writing assignment using non-speciesist idioms
- Debate performance and reflection

- Contribution to the class animal-respectful expressions guide
- Final project: Write an essay analysing the role of language in shaping attitudes towards animals and the potential impact of using more mindful, animal-respectful expressions

Additional assessment ideas:

- Idiom journal: Students keep a weekly journal tracking their use of animal-based idioms and efforts to replace them with animal-respectful alternatives.
- Community impact project: Students design and implement a project to promote empathetic language in their community.
- Multimedia presentation: Create a video or podcast episode explaining the importance of non-speciesist language.

These lesson plans can be adjusted based on the specific needs and interests of the students, as well as the time available. It provides a comprehensive exploration of the topic while engaging students in critical thinking, creative writing and collaborative work.

Section 8: Glossary of terms:

Abolitionist animal rights and veganism: A philosophy and social movement that seeks to end all forms of animal exploitation entirely, not merely reform them. It opposes the use of animals for food, clothing, entertainment, research or labour.

Animal commodification: The process by which animals are treated as property, objects or resources to be owned, bought, sold or used, rather than as sentient beings with interests of their own.

Euphemism: A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing. In animal exploitation contexts, euphemisms hide the reality of suffering (e.g., veal instead of baby cow flesh).

Linguistic determinism: The theory that the language we use influences or determines the way we think. This includes the idea that speciesist language shapes our perception of animals as lesser or unworthy of moral consideration.

Linguistic violence: The use of language in a way that dehumanises or devalues others, often used to obscure violence or justify exploitation. In this context, it refers to terms that reduce animals to products, insults or tools.

Non-speciesist language: Language that avoids reinforcing the belief in human superiority over other animals. It centres sentient beings as individuals rather than objects and it rejects terms that justify or normalise harm.

Personhood (of animals): The recognition that all animals (human and non-human) are individuals with interests, feelings and the capacity to suffer or flourish. Personhood challenges legal and social systems that treat animals as property.

Sentience: The capacity to feel, perceive or experience subjectively. Recognising animal sentience is foundational to animal rights and to understanding the need for non-speciesist language.

Speciesism: A form of discrimination based on species. It involves treating the interests of non-human animals as less important than those of humans, often used to justify their exploitation.

Truth-based language: Honest terminology that does not obscure violence or exploitation. Examples include using animal flesh instead of meat or slaughterhouse instead of processing plant.

Speciesist language: Words, phrases or expressions that reinforce the belief that humans are inherently superior to other animals, often normalising their exploitation, objectification or treatment as property. This type of language can perpetuate harmful attitudes toward non-human animals and obscure the reality of their sentience and rights.

Section 9: Last word: The future of language is abolitionist animal rights

As we close this guide, we stand at a crossroads between the world as it is and the world as it could be. Our language reflects our deepest values and for too long, those values have been shaped by speciesist thinking, institutionalised violence and the normalisation of animal use. But language can be reclaimed, and when it is, it becomes a powerful tool for liberation.

Shifting from speciesist idioms and commodifying terms to expressions rooted in justice is more than a linguistic exercise, it's a political and ethical transformation. It's a refusal to participate in a culture that trivialises animal suffering or renders it invisible. It's a step toward a world in which all beings are recognised as individuals with their own lives, interests and right to be free from harm.

We are not asking for perfection. We are advocating for intentionality. For mindfulness. For a commitment to aligning our language with our ethics.

Like the abolition of slavery or the fight for women's suffrage, the end of animal exploitation will require cultural, systemic and linguistic change. Every time we say 'bring home the bagels' instead of 'bacon' or 'he/she/they' instead of 'it', we take one more step away from domination and one step closer to dignity, for all.

Your voice matters. Your words carry weight. Here's how you can continue this work:

1. **Speak consciously:** Notice and replace speciesist expressions in your daily speech and writing.
2. **Educate others:** Share the reasoning behind non-speciesist language with friends, students and community groups.
3. **Create new language:** Invent empathetic idioms and accurate alternatives that reflect empathy and truth.
4. **Embrace growth:** Language change takes practice. Mistakes are part of the process. Keep evolving.
5. **Challenge euphemisms:** Confront sanitised language in media, policy and marketing, speak the truth.
6. **Use platforms:** Advocate for non-speciesist language in schools, workplaces, journalism and activism.
7. **Model the change:** Be the example. Let your vocabulary reflect your values.
8. **Reflect regularly:** Ask yourself, "Do my words uplift or erase?" Let that question guide you.
9. **Support education:** Recommend this guide to others. Use it in classrooms, workshops and outreach.

10. **Link words to action:** Let your language be part of a broader commitment to abolitionist animal rights and veganism.

Every phrase you choose can either reinforce injustice or inspire empathy. Use your words as instruments of liberation. Speak with clarity. Speak with courage. Speak for those whose voices have been silenced.

The revolution begins not only in our hearts and on our plates, but on our tongues.

Thank you for being part of this movement for communication based on truth and justice. Let your voice rise for every silenced one. The world is listening.

