

Meet Your Meat

Activity 1: True or False?

Divide the students into pairs or groups so they can discuss each statement as a team before writing down their answers. Read the following statements and ask students to write down “true” or “false”:

1. **Mother hens cluck to their unborn chicks, and the chicks chirp back to their mothers from inside their shells. True**

It is thought that the mother and chick chirp back and forth to each other to help the chick identify the mother and establish communication between them.

2. **Geese mate for life and grieve over their lost partners for a long time. True**

If one mate is killed, it is common for the other goose to stop grooming, lose interest in food and even move slowly – all of which are classic signs of deep depression. The bereaved goose may never take another partner.

3. **Pigs are naturally dirty animals. False**

Pigs are naturally clean animals, but on factory farms, pigs are forced to stand in their own manure – or sit above it and breathe in its fumes if it falls into a waste pit below.

Pigs do not have sweat glands, so pigs sometimes lie in mud in order to stay cool and ward off flies.

4. **Cows naturally produce milk at all times during their lives. False**

Cows produce milk for about 10 months after having a calf and are then impregnated again. Cows produce milk for the same reason that humans do: to nourish their young. On dairy farms their calves are taken away from them shortly after birth, and humans drink the cows’ milk instead.

5. **In nature, mother pigs build nests out of twigs and give birth in them. True**

Pigs kept on factory farms live in concrete enclosures and are unable to dig holes in the dirt as they naturally would. On factory farms, you can find sows who have bloody noses from trying to “root” in the concrete as they get ready to give birth.

6. **Sheep all look very similar, so members of a flock cannot recognise each other. False**

Every sheep has a different face, and flockmates can recognise each other. Studies have shown that they can even recognise other sheep they know from photographs – even after they’ve been separated for years.

7. **When given a round object such as a melon, turkeys and chickens will play with it and roll it around in much the same way that we might play with a football. True**

Many animals love to play as we do, and as with people, some animals are more athletic than others.

8. **Chickens communicate with each other by using just two different sounds – a cluck and a peep. False**

Chickens communicate using at least 24 distinct sounds, including separate alarm calls that identify different kinds of predators, such as a dog on the ground or a hawk in the sky.

Background

No matter what your school’s primary reason for taking part in Meat Free Monday – be it to reduce the school’s environmental impact, encourage healthy eating or cut school spending – most people find it reassuring to know that taking part is also a compassionate step that helps prevent cruelty and suffering.

Over 60 billion animals are farmed and killed for meat each year. Most of them are raised in intensive factory farms, in cramped, overcrowded cages, sheds and pens.

This lesson prompts students to consider the issues by giving them the opportunity to “meet their meat”.

Learning Objectives

Students should learn the following:

- To recognise that animals have the same basic needs and experience similar sorts of emotions to humans
- To be aware of the ways in which animals are treated on factory farms today
- To contribute ideas, discuss issues and listen to others’ views

Accompanying Materials

Meet Your Meat (student handout)

Go through the answers and ask the students if they were surprised by any of the facts. You can extend this part of the lesson by asking the students if they know any interesting facts about animals’ abilities, feelings or ways of life. They might have learned other facts while watching documentaries about animals and can use these to create more true-or-false questions for other students.



Activity 2: Reading Comprehension

Photocopy the student handout **Meet Your Meat**. Ask students to read the information carefully, then instruct them to answer the comprehension questions which follow.

Activity 3: Question Time

This part of the lesson covers the moral and ethical issues associated with vegetarianism. Divide the class into groups, and give each group a different question to discuss. Prompt students if necessary (as appropriate to the students, or using the suggestions below), or let them conduct internet research at home or in class. Have a class feedback session in which all groups report back to the class by reading their questions and conclusions. Members of groups may disagree, but all opinions should be represented in the feedback. Other members of the class can also comment.

- What would happen to all the animals if everyone went vegetarian, and how would farmers make a living?
- Are humans natural carnivores?
- Is it OK to eat animals whom we believe to be less intelligent than humans?
- Humans have eaten animals throughout history. If it were wrong to eat animals, wouldn't it be illegal?

Teacher Prompts (Vegetarian Perspective)

What would happen to all the animals if everyone went vegetarian, and how would farmers make a living?

People wouldn't stop eating animals overnight. As the demand for meat decreased, fewer animals would be raised for their flesh. If there were fewer of these animals, those remaining would be able to live more natural lives. Farmers would turn to other types of agriculture – after all, no one who stops eating meat stops eating!

Are humans natural carnivores?

This is a much-debated question. Often highlighted is the fact that our long, winding intestines make it impossible for us to rapidly expel meat from our bodies as true carnivores do. Not only do carnivorous animals have short digestive tracts, they also have claws and long, curved fangs, and they do not perspire through their skin. We have flat, flexible nails and do perspire through our skin, and our "canine" teeth are minuscule compared to those of carnivores.

Is it OK to eat animals whom we believe to be less intelligent than humans?

One might argue that possessing superior intelligence does not entitle one human to abuse another human, so why should it entitle humans to abuse non-humans? There are also different types of intelligence: Try navigating using the Earth's magnetic field as many birds do, collecting dew to drink as the desert mouse does, crossing a river on a leaf as ants do or sending signals underground as elephants and (by tapping on tree trunks) frogs do.

Humans have eaten animals throughout history. If it were wrong to eat animals, wouldn't it be illegal?

Just because something has been going on for a long time doesn't mean that it's right. And legality is no guarantee of morality, either. The law changes as public opinion changes. Child labour, human slavery and the oppression of women were all legal and commonly accepted at one time, but that does not mean that they were ever ethical.

Activity 4: Debate

Motion: This House believes that humans are justified in eating animals.

- Divide the class into two groups. Have one group argue for the motion and one against it. You may wish to use the structure of a British Parliamentary Debate. This could consist of four teams of two speakers, with two teams on either side of the case. Speakers, and students in the audience, should offer Points of Information (POIs) to their opponents. At the end of the debate you should vote to see if the motion is carried or opposed.

Extension Ideas

- Show students the 27-minute film Stimulus Response, which features scientists from Britain's leading veterinary schools. Using video footage of animals, the film teaches the five steps of the stimulus-response pathway by using examples from animals' lives. The footage demonstrates that animals learn from experience, use their senses and need companionship and exercise – just as humans do. You can view the film at vimeo.com/7592583.
- Show students the 16-minute film From Farm to Fork, from Animal Aid. Covering the origins of factory farming, selective breeding of farmed animals, animal welfare impacts of intensive farming and personal action and food choices, this film is ideal for stimulating discussion and debate about the way we rear animals for food today. You can view the film at youtube.com/watch?v=u9IU7GOPWAw.
- Have students research different animal rights organisations' campaigns which encourage people to adopt a vegetarian or vegan diet in order to protect animals. They may wish to research Animal Aid, Farm Sanctuary, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), United Poultry Concerns (UPC), and Vegetarians' International Voice for Animals (Viva!). How do the different groups get their message across? What methods do students think are effective/ineffective? Students can be split into groups to devise their own vegetarian or Meat Free Monday campaign strategies and materials.

Use the MFM Impact Calculator at meatfreemondays.com/calculator to find out how many animals you could save by doing Meat Free Monday or more.

Meet Your Meat

In order to keep up with global demand for burgers, bangers, steaks and nuggets, around 60 billion animals are farmed and killed each year. The vast majority are raised in intensive “factory farms”, inside which they are crammed into small, dirty, overcrowded enclosures or cages. The life of a farmed animal is a short and unhappy one, culminating at the slaughterhouse.



What happens to cattle?

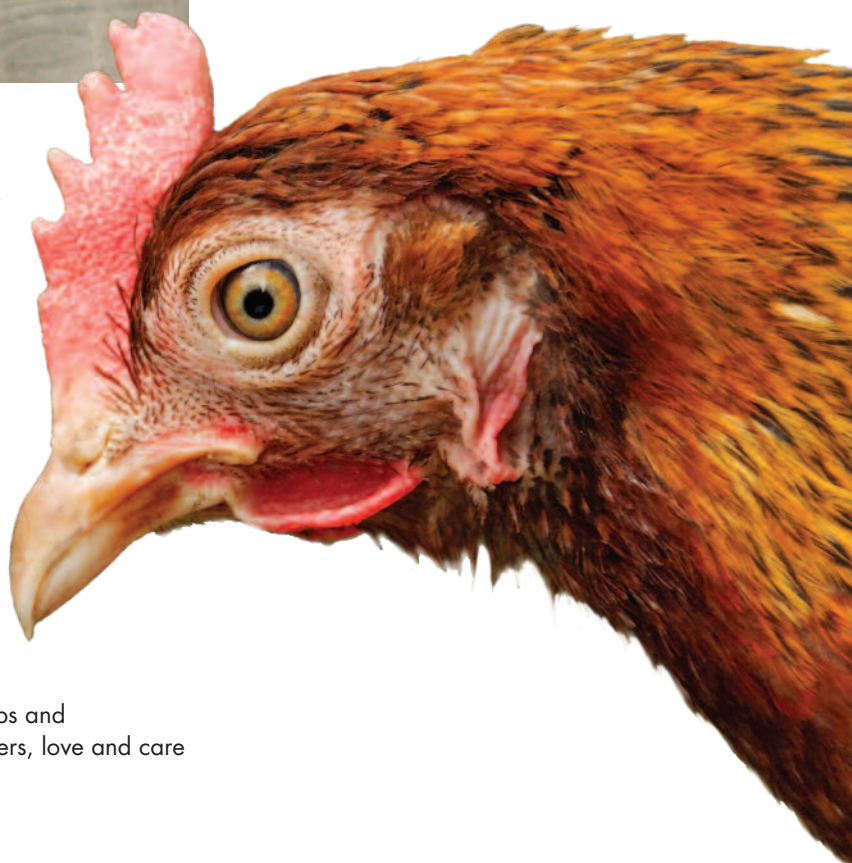
Cattle raised for beef traditionally graze in the open, although they may spend winters indoors. At about the age of one, calves can be moved into crowded sheds and fed a high-protein diet to ensure rapid growth. Cattle are often fed antibiotics to keep them alive through the stressful conditions that they’re forced to endure, and many live in a chronic state of low-grade illness. In fattening sheds, animals are often forced to stand on concrete, which can result in serious leg problems. Most cattle undergo painful mutilations, such as castration and dehorning (their horns are chemically burnt off).

What happens to chickens?

The majority of “broiler chickens” and “laying hens” live in vast warehouses where lighting and ventilation are controlled by machines and where there is very little room to move around. In order to fatten them up quickly, many farmers drug and genetically manipulate chickens; as a result, birds may suffer from painful, crippling bone disorders or spinal defects.

Consumers often don’t realise that even eggs labelled as “free range” often come from hens raised in dark, extremely crowded sheds, much like those that are used to confine “broiler chickens”. These sheds have holes in them that allow hens to go outside, but often only the more dominant hens succeed in doing so. Most male chicks – animals of no use in egg production – are killed as soon as they hatch.

Chickens are inquisitive and interesting animals, in some ways thought to be as intelligent as cats, dogs and even primates. When in their natural surroundings – away from factory farms – they enjoy full lives in which they form friendships and social hierarchies, recognise one another, develop pecking orders, love and care for their young, dust-bathe, make nests and roost in trees.





What happens to pigs?

Most pigs reared for meat are kept indoors in extremely crowded, often filthy conditions on factory farms. A lack of exercise can cause pigs to become so weak that they can barely walk. They typically suffer from skeletal problems and diseases of the legs and feet. Pneumonia, meningitis and dysentery are commonplace.

Treated like machines, breeding sows are artificially inseminated and forced to give birth to five litters of piglets every two years. The majority of these sows are kept indoors for their entire lives and most are moved to farrowing crates to give birth in barren stalls, before being separated from their young by metal bars. They are allowed only enough room to feed their piglets but not enough room to nuzzle them. After just three to four weeks, the piglets are taken from their mothers and are fattened up in order to be slaughtered for bacon, ham or pork. Because they get frustrated in their barren surroundings, they bite one another's tails, which causes serious wounds. To prevent this, workers cut the pigs' tails off, clip their teeth with pliers or both – usually without using anaesthetic.

How do animals die?

No matter where they are kept – whether on factory farms or on free-range farms – all farmed animals are shipped to the slaughterhouse at the end of their short lives.

In most cases, slaughter is carried out by “stunning” and “sticking” animals – stunning so the animals lose consciousness before being killed (via a metal bolt through the brain, an electrical current or gas) and then sticking (where the animals' throats are cut using a sharp knife or mechanical neck cutter). Some animals are also now killed in “Controlled Atmosphere Systems” using gas. Animals killed by religious slaughter methods – Halal (Muslim) and Shechita (Jewish) – are not usually stunned first.

Slaughter processes are often poorly governed which can result in animal abuse. Abattoir veterinarian Gabriele Meurer catalogues such abuse with scientific precision in a letter to Vival: “Not many animals stand still. They are all upset, some frightened to death and some move violently. The animals are never given time to calm down. Some of them won't calm down no matter what you do. Sometimes the slaughterman misses, wounding the animal terribly instead of stunning it”.

Pigs are sometimes conscious through the entire slaughter process. Says Meurer, “The slaughtermen are in such a hurry that they often don't put the electric tongs in the correct position on the pigs' heads. The pigs get only half or insufficiently stunned, wake up while they bleed and are obviously still alive and conscious when they plunge into the boiling water. Sheep are stunned just as badly”.

Chickens and turkeys are hung upside down by their already crippled legs and often regain consciousness (or because of ineffective stunning, never lose consciousness) while their necks bleed out. Thus, many of them are still conscious when they are immersed in the scalding-hot water of de-feathering tanks.

Questions

1. How many animals are killed each year?
2. What can be wrong with some “free-range” farms?
3. Can you list two activities which chickens like to do in the wild?
4. How do farmers prevent piglets biting each other?
5. Can you name one problem associated with slaughterhouses?

