

Ethical Veganism in RE

Unit 1 (ages 5 to 7)

What can we learn from religious stories about how humans should treat other animals?

Focus on Christianity, Judaism and Islam



‘Beautiful Animals’

Georgia, Age 6, West Midlands
NATRE Art in Heaven entry, 2008

Georgia wrote:

“I have designed this collage to show that I am thankful for all the beautiful animals that live in our world.”

Aims of Religious Education

The principal aim of religious education is to explore what people believe and what difference this makes to how they live, so that pupils can gain the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to handle questions raised by religion and belief, reflecting on their own ideas and ways of living.

To help you to make the most of these units, please read and refer to the accompanying Teachers' Guide.

About this unit:

This unit introduces pupils to stances that support the compassionate treatment of animals as articulated through stories from the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is an age-appropriate introduction to thinking about the responsibilities human beings may have towards other animals, and how, for some religious believers, care and compassion for animals may be seen as a duty.

This unit centres around four stories from three religions. Dealing with three religions is a challenge for 5- to 7-year-olds, so be selective if you need to be. Consider how this unit fits in with your RE syllabus and how it contributes to learners' understanding of the religions which feature. These units are designed to be flexible! You may wish to adapt to suit your syllabus, cohort and contexts for RE. For instance, the next unit in this series focuses on stories from dharmic religions. If your syllabus includes a dharmic religion at ages 5-7, feel free to take content from this and adapt the level of challenge accordingly.

The activities enable deep thinking and discussion. Learners will make comparisons, ask questions and discuss a range of viewpoints. Interpreting what the stories mean for believers and the impact and influence on their lives will be encouraged as much as personal reflection on learners' own views and perspectives.

The unit begins a theological and philosophical exploration of the moral status of animals, as well as human beings' relationship with the environment. Even at this early stage, learners begin to engage with key questions which are golden threads running through the entire series of units: How do humans treat animals and does this align with how they *should* be treated? Do animals have rights? Should we differentiate between different species of animals, giving more regard to some than to others, and if so, why? Has religion been good or bad for animals?

This unit fosters learners' understanding that Christians, Jewish people and Muslims believe that the world, and all of the creatures in it, are God's creation. The stories provided as stimuli here articulate the belief, for many followers of these Abrahamic religions, that kindness and compassion towards animals is a duty to God, integral to honouring His creation. As we progress through these units, learners will see how some religious believers – but by no means a majority of them – view commitment to ethical veganism as a logical conclusion to fulfilling their religious and moral duty in regard to caring for God's creation.

The enquiry questions set challenging standards for learners, encouraging them to think critically and creatively and to engage in thoughtful discussion. As with the teaching of all religious and non-religious worldviews, this unit does not seek to promote any worldview as correct, nor does it seek to alter the views or behaviours of the children/young people who engage with it.

Where does this unit fit in?

The unit will provide teachers with guidance in planning and delivering up to 3 hours of RE lessons designed for pupils around the ages of 5 to 7 years old. Of course, these lessons can be adapted to suit children of other ages and teachers might wish to make adaptations to the content to suit their particular cohorts. The lessons are designed to slot easily into RE schemes of learning.

Teachers are encouraged to think about where these lessons may fit in with their current RE syllabus. The lessons can be used to enrich currently taught themes/religions/worldviews. For instance, to enhance teaching about stewardship and religious concern for the environment, as well as the more obvious placement within themes that deal with religious (and/or secular) views of animals. They may also be added to a systematic study of religion, offering a new dimension on belief and practice within a particular religious tradition. Alternatively, these lessons could be used within a stand-alone RE enrichment day.

Estimated teaching time for this unit is 3 hours. Teach less, in depth, if you have less time – it is not recommended to skate over the surface of the important issues covered in these lessons. Invest more time if you can, or teach fewer concepts well if time is limited.

This unit is designed to enable you to select and omit the content that you wish your learners to encounter. For instance, you may wish to focus on just one story or religious tradition. It can be split across year groups or taught as a complete package.

The unit will provide these opportunities:

- Examining stories from the three Abrahamic religions that encourage compassionate treatment of animals
- Considering the impact and influence of these stories on the daily lives of believers
- Thinking about their own views in relation to these narratives
- Early exploration and discussion of philosophical and theological stances on the moral status of animals
- Deeper thinking around the values that underpin religious belief and practice
- Creative and critical engagement with sources of wisdom which will enhance learners' religious literacy
- Development of literacy skills through discussion and writing activities

KEY THEMES ADDRESSED BY THIS UNIT

Beliefs and concepts:

- The treatment of non-human animals by humans and the extent to which this aligns with religious values
- Extending compassion, consideration and kindness beyond humans and towards non-human animals
- Ways in which kindness and compassion to animals has featured in religious stories, and the significance of this

ATTITUDES FOCUS: Students will explore attitudes of:

- **Self-awareness** by becoming more aware of the implications of behaviour and ideas about human and animal relations
- **Open mindedness** by thinking deeply on the issues and discussing varying and sometimes conflicting views with peers
- **Empathy** by being encouraged to think about and reflect upon the experiences of non-human animals
- **Compassion** by thinking about how their own actions and those of other human beings impact on non-human animals, and considering ways to have a positive impact

<p>Contributions to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students</p> <p>Opportunities for spiritual development come from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with profound questions about how religious people understand the value of human and non-human animals and their relationships with each other, the natural world and, where applicable with God or • Reflecting on and developing their own views in relation to stories and enabling pupils to think critically about these and to express their own views <p>Opportunities for moral development come from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring and valuing a diversity of views and values on issues relating to kindness to animals • Asking and answering moral questions: Do we have moral duties towards non-human animals, and if so what are these duties? • Reflecting and formulating ideas around duties, rights, responsibilities and our place and status in the world in relation to non-human animals and the environment <p>Opportunities for social development come from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciating different ways and contexts for thinking about how animals should be treated by humans • Considering a range of stances on the treatment of animals and understanding why some religious people see kindness to animals as an important responsibility • Articulating their own ideas and understanding those of others <p>Opportunities for cultural development come from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring the relationship between religious and cultural motivations for kindness to animals • Promoting inter-cultural understanding whereby pupils are encouraged to reflect upon their own cultural pre-dispositions
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<p>Expectations: By the end of this unit, most learners should achieve the following outcomes:</p>		
<p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that some stories from religion encourage people to be kind and caring towards animals • Talk about the different meanings these stories could hold for Christians, Jewish people and Muslims 	<p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how the stories featured in this unit may influence how Christians, Jewish people and Muslims live their lives • Begin to think about how religious believers might come to different conclusions about what these stories teach 	<p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast stories from the three Abrahamic religions • Begin to consider what duties human beings might have towards other animals -are these duties different or the same, depending on your religious (or non-religious) view of the world?

Please feel free to adapt these to meet the requirements of your RE syllabus.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE FOR LEARNERS

Before beginning this unit of work, pupils would benefit from a rudimentary introduction to the three Abrahamic religions featured: namely, Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

A basic understanding of the position of key protagonists in relation to the religions featured would be helpful: e.g., the Prophet Muhammad. Checking that learners understand, in simple terms, what is meant by a prophet, a saint and God/Allah will be useful to enable them to fully engage and think critically and creatively about the stories.

It may be helpful to learners to have a basic knowledge of the Creation stories – the Judeo-Christian account from Genesis 1 and the Islamic account of Creation from the Qur’an.

SUB QUESTION: Why are stories important?	
<p>Ideas and some content for learning: Teachers can select content from these examples and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.</p> <p>What is your favourite story? Start by asking pupils to think about story time in class? Invite them to tell a partner what they like about story time at school. Share some contributions as a class. With their eyes closed, ask them to think about the story they have most enjoyed hearing in class story time. After some thinking time, ask them to raise their hands without shouting out and ask for some contributions from the class. Use stratified questioning to encourage pupils to explain what they liked about the story. Ask if others in the class had chosen the same story and invite them to share their reasons for choosing it too.</p> <p>Why do we have story time at school? Invite learners to offer some ideas about why they spend time at school, which is all about learning, listening to and reading stories. Encourage thinking about stories as ways that people learn about the world. Stories are memorable, enjoyable. Pose the question to the class: can we learn from stories? Choose a few pupils to share their ideas. Invite pupils to share stories they learned from. What did they learn? Extend their thinking further if you can, by asking them why stories are good ways for people to learn about the world.</p> <p>Stories from religion? Challenge pupils to think of some stories that might be important to religious people. They may think of examples such as the Nativity in Christianity, Creation stories, some parables or stories of miracles from the life of Jesus. Perhaps they have learnt about the story of the Ten Plagues from the Old Testament, stories about the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Of course, welcome examples of stories from a wider range of religions than those to be studied in this unit. Be ready to offer learners some examples. Use questions to draw out their understanding of why the stories may be important to religious people and what they may learn from them.</p> <p>Do stories help us to decide how to live and what to believe in? Give learners a simple writing frame to record some of their ideas: A story I have learnt from is.... This story taught me that.... A story that is important for Christians/Muslims/Jewish people is.... This story teaches that.... This means that Christians/Muslims/Jewish people may believe... do....</p>	<p>Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):</p> <p>Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:</p> <p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that stories can be important ways that people learn about the world • Give examples of stories that are important to religious people <p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how stories can have an impact and influence on people’s lives • Give at least one example of how a religious story may influence what a person does, says or believes <p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the similarities and differences found in the stories from the religions studied (perhaps also considering non-religious stories, too) • Begin to evaluate how important stories are in helping people to decide how to live or what to believe in.

SUB QUESTION: What can we learn about kindness to animals from the story of Rebecca at the Well?

Ideas and some content for learning:

Teachers can select content from these examples and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.

Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):

What would you do?

Ask learners to think about their home. How many taps are there at home? Count them all. Have a show of hands: who has more than 10 taps at home? 9, 8, all the way down to zero! Discuss the importance of having access to water. Explain that in times gone by, and still to this day in some places around the world, if you need some water you have to go to a spring or a well. This might be a long walk and water is very heavy. You might want to think of a way of demonstrating this fact, perhaps with a bucket of water or a rucksack containing lots of water bottles – take care and think of health and safety rules (maybe you or another adult can lift the water to show how heavy it is).

Now ask everyone to close their eyes and get ready to do some imagining! Imagine nobody in our town/village/city has taps in their house, and the only water you can get is from a well that’s a 10-minute walk away. Tell them to imagine, it’s your job to get the water for you family and you have a big heavy jug or bucket to carry it back in. If someone needs a bath, you’ll have to do quite a few trips back and forth. This imaginative exercise encourages empathy, and it is worth making learners aware that this is the reality for many children around the world today.

Extending this imaginative exercise, invite learners to imagine it is a warm evening, and they have just got a heavy jug of water for their family when a tired-looking man, travelling with 10 camels asks them politely to give him some water to drink. What would you do? After some thinking time, let learners turn to a partner/talk in small groups about what they would do. Have a class discussion: Who would say no to the man and tell him to get his own water? After all, it’s hard enough work as it is. Who would give the man a drink, although it means going back and getting more water? Who thought about the camels? They would be tired and thirsty, too. Discuss that camels will need a lot of water to quench their thirst. Would they be willing to get lots and lots of extra water? This discussion should help learners to engage with the story.

What is the story of Rebecca at the Well and why is it important?

Introduce learners to the story of Rebecca at the Well. In the Supplementary Resource for this unit, Resource 2 is a simple, one-page version. Explain that this is a very important story to both Jewish people and Christians, and share some of the context from the Essential Knowledge for Teachers, Resource 1 in the Supplementary Resource for this unit, e.g., the important status of Abraham, Isaac and Rebecca, and the fact that this is the first story in the Bible where two people fall in love. Read the story to the class.

Ask learners first to reflect on how Rebecca’s actions compared with what they said they would do. What do they think of what Rebecca did? Why was this so important? Encourage reflection on whether showing kindness to animals is important, making sure that learners give reasons for their responses. Discuss what this story teaches Jewish people and Christians about the importance of caring for animals. Rebecca was chosen to be Isaac’s wife because of her kindness to the camels, not her beauty, nor because she was from a rich family, nor even because she showed kindness to another person. How do learners think that this story might influence Jewish people in their day to day lives? Invite them to come up with some examples.

Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:

Make sense of belief:

- Understand that the story of Rebecca at the well is important to both Jewish people and Christians
- Appreciate that many Jewish people and Christians believe that this story shows that God wants people to be kind to animals

Understand the impact:

- Give examples of how this story may influence Jewish people and Christians to be kind to animals in their day to day lives

Make connections:

- Reflect on their own attitudes and actions towards kindness to animals considering this story

SUB QUESTION: Who was St Philip Neri and what can we learn from him about kindness to animals?

<p>Ideas and some content for learning: Teachers can select content from these examples, and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):</p>
<p>What does it mean to be kind to animals? Ask learners to draw a picture and perhaps write a sentence or two describing a time when they/someone they know was especially kind to animals.</p> <p>What is a role model? Invite a few pupils to show and tell their work. Explain that people may often have role models. Share with pupils an example of someone you see as a role model. Discuss some examples of role models in learners’ own lives to aid understanding. Explain that saints are people who many Christians believe had a special connection with God and who lived especially good lives. For some Christians saints are important role models.</p> <p>St Philip Neri – a role model for some Christians? Read the account of Philip Neri (Resource 3 within the Supplementary Resource for this unit) to the class. After they have heard the story, ask pupils to recall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 thing that made the saint unusual (answer is that he was vegetarian, and not just vegetarian to please God, but it seems that he was vegetarian because he did not want animals to be killed for food) • What sort of person he was – sad, serious, grumpy, or jolly (answer – jolly, full of laughter) • 1 way he cared for people (answer - he welcomed pilgrims to the holy city of Rome) • 3 ways he showed that he cared deeply for animals (answers could include – being vegetarian, setting birds free from cages – remember to tell pupils that they should never do this as in the modern world, birds freed from cages would probably not be able to survive -, refusing to swat flies, or to kill mice, i.e., animals that most people see as pests) <p>Explain that human beings use animals in different ways, and they treat different types of animals differently, too. Can the class come up with any examples? St Philip Neri believed that people should think harder about how they treat all kinds of animals. Even tiny flies he believed were an important part of God’s creation, worthy of kindness. Ask learners to think about these scenarios. What would St Philip Neri say? What are learners’ own opinions. Be sure to ask questions that enable pupils to give reasons for their thoughts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking a cat home from a pet rescue centre and giving them a good home, with plenty of love • Keeping a goldfish in a tiny bowl • Eating a beef burger • Squishing a spider because it looks scary • Setting a trap for mice, that doesn’t harm them, but enables you to take them to a field to be released • Keeping animals in cages at zoos 	<p>Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:</p> <p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that saints can be important role models for some Christians • Explore the example of a Christian saint who showed kindness and concern for animals <p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about how following the example of a saint like St Philip Neri might influence a person’s beliefs and ways of living <p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to think deeply about how animals are used by humans considering Christian responses and learners’ own views

Discuss some or all of these examples and feel free to introduce your own as well. Using pupils' own examples from the earlier discussion may also be very helpful. These scenarios allow for nuanced discussion as well as critical and creative responses. It is important to encourage learners to formulate and articulate their own authentic viewpoints.

St Philip Neri as a role model for Christians

Class discussion: Phil is a Christian who didn't know about St Philip Neri until his priest mentioned him at church. Phil likes that he shares the same name with this saint. He is reading about him and has decided he is a good role model. What might Phil do in his everyday life with St Philip Neri as a role model? Why?

To extend this learning, you may wish to consider other Christian saints renowned for their compassion towards animals, e.g. St Anthony of Padua, St Francis of Assisi, St Gertrude. Here are some examples: [Saints Who Loved Animals – Catholic Concern for Animals \(catholic-animals.com\)](https://catholic-animals.com/).

St Melangell is a good example of a Welsh female saint, often regarded as the Welsh patron saint for animals. She took a stand against hunting with hounds back in the early 7th Century. Read about St Melangell here: <https://animal-interfaith-alliance.com/2015/07/11/st-melangell-patron-saint-of-animals-for-wales-said-no-to-hunting/>

Deepening thinking about St Philip Neri

Encourage pupils to use their imagination (choose one or more of these activities to help learners' creative engagement):

- Explain that some Christians have celebrations each year to honour and remember important saints. The celebrations reflect things that were important in the saint's life and their beliefs. Imagine there was 'St Philip Neri' day, with an extra day off school! What sort of things might people do to celebrate and remember his life?
- Design a 'St Philip Neri Day' greetings card, with a picture on the front, and a message or verse inside
- Imagine St Philip Neri could time travel and visit us a school. What question(s) would you want to ask him? How do you think he would reply?

SUB QUESTION: What can we learn about kindness to animals from two Muslim stories?

<p>Ideas and some content for learning: Teachers can select content from these examples, and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):</p>
<p>Squishing ants – a good or bad idea? You may wish to introduce learners to picture book <i>Hey, Little Ant</i> by Hannah and Phillip Hoose. It is an imaginary conversation between a ‘kid’ and an ant who talks. The audience decides whether they would squish the ant. A class discussion about this is a good way into the Islamic stories to follow, particularly the Story of the Prophet and the Ants. People often don’t value or even consider tiny animals. Encourage pupils to think about why this is – sometimes we think they are so small, they don’t feel pain, or that they are creepy or a nuisance, etc. Show this short clip (aimed at Key Stage 2, but suitable for KS1): Science KS2: Inside an ant colony - BBC Teach. Ask learners what they found out? What was a surprise to them? In what ways are ants actually like us? The clip shows that ants are very much part of communities, and different individuals take different roles that are important within their communities (the ant in <i>Hey, Little Ant</i> alludes to this, too). Share with the class that this is something acknowledged in the Qur’an: “There is not an animal that lives on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but they form communities like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they all shall be gathered to their Lord in the end” (Quran 6:38). You might also want to show some pictures of Jains who use soft brushes to gently brush aside tiny insects to avoid stepping on them, and who wear masks to avoid accidentally inhaling or swallowing them. Refer to St Philip Neri’s refusal to squash flies.</p> <p>Two Muslim stories: The Prophet and the Ants and the Tired (or Crying) Camel These two stories can be read from the Supplementary Resource, Resource 4. There is also a short BBC animated clip: Religious Studies KS1: The Islamic Story of The Prophet and the Ants and 'The Crying Camel' - BBC Teach After watching or reading these stories, ask learners to offer evidence from the stories for Muslim believers about animals: How do we know, from these stories that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslims believe that God/Allah created animals? • Muslims believe that all animals, no matter how tiny are important to God? • God/Allah does not like people to be uncaring towards animals? • God/Allah wants Muslims to take great care for animals and make sure that they are comfortable? <p>Is there anything else that we can learn about Muslim beliefs about animals?</p> <p>Should people stand up for animals? The two Muslim stories are both cases where the Prophet Muhammad stood up to defend animals from human carelessness towards them. If you read, <i>‘Hey, Little Ant’</i>, ask learners to imagine what the Prophet Muhammad would say to the ‘kid’ at the end of the story. Challenge them to give reasons for their ideas. Discuss, as a class, thoughts about whether people should follow The Prophet Muhammad’s example and speak up for animals if they think people are being thoughtless or mean to them. Why might this be a good or bad idea? How might we speak up for animals in a way that is kind to people as well? Encourage them to think about whether we can be more aware of being kind to animals at school. What might this look like in practice at school? A class project inspired by the stories and aimed at being kinder to animals at school could be a great way for learners to collaborate, develop empathy and foster a sense of community.</p>	<p>Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:</p> <p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that Muslims learn from the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad that all animals are important to God/Allah and deserve to be treated with kindness <p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give examples of how Muslims might put these beliefs about animals into practice <p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use these stories as a way to prompt thinking and discussion around learners’ own opinions about how to treat animals

SUB QUESTION: What have we learnt about Jewish, Christian and Muslim views on the treatment of animals?

<p>Ideas and some content for learning: Teachers can select content from these examples, and add more of their own to enable students to achieve the outcomes.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes (applying this content to the RE end of key stage outcomes):</p>
<p>What can you remember? Test learners' recall. Use stratified questioning and choose different contributors to make corrections and point out omissions, and also to reflect on the key teachings and messages in the stories. Who can tell us about the story with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A campfire in it? • A well? • A vegetarian? • One camel? <p>After recalling and reflecting on the meaning of these stories, invite learners to choose their favourite story. Use a writing frame for them to record their ideas, e.g.: My favourite story about kindness to animals was... I really like this story because.... It teaches that...</p> <p>Creative challenge In groups, ask learners to invent their own story about being kind to animals. They could act this out in front of the class.</p>	<p>Teachers will enable students to achieve these outcomes, as appropriate to their age and stage, so that they can:</p> <p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how the stories considered in this unit encourage Jewish people, Christians and Muslims to be kind to animals <p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give examples of how the principles taught in these stories might be put into action <p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise common beliefs in these stories • Think about the influence of these stories on own views