

Ethical Veganism in RE

Unit 3 (ages 10 to 12)

Should the Golden Rule include animals?



'The Golden Rule'

Alice, Age 11

NATRE Art in Heaven, 2014

Alice wrote:

"My artwork symbolises the relationship (or what should be) between animals and humans and the equality between them and the love which is represented by the ocean heart. The faiths around 'the island of equality' represents the love and respect for each and every person and thing. That is what the GOLDEN RULE is about!!!"

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 Teachers' Guide.

About this unit:

This Religious Education unit is offered to teachers as an opportunity for introducing pupils to ethical veganism by means of considering the 'big idea' of The Golden Rule, which finds expression, in some form or another, in almost all major world faiths and ethical codes for living. Simply put, The Golden Rule states that we should treat others as we would wish to be treated. As a principle guiding our relationships and interactions with fellow human beings, The Golden Rule is widely accepted as uncontroversial: an ideal to live up to in our day to day lives (although we might not always manage it in practice). The question with which this unit aims to engage learners is whether this rule should be restricted to the human sphere or whether it should extend to encompass non-human animals as well.

The unit is thematic and looks at perspectives across religions. It introduces ethical veganism as a worldview. The unit builds on learning from the previous units in this series, which explore Abrahamic and Dharmic stories and teachings that encourage kindness and compassion towards non-human animals, and empathy with them. Whilst learners may benefit from this prior learning, this unit is not reliant upon it. This unit can stand alone, and please feel free to make use of the stories and teachings from previous units, incorporating them into this unit where you feel they may enhance learning for pupils who have not had the opportunity to study them.

Ethical veganism is an important area for study in a programme of RE which values teaching about religious and non-religious worldviews, and which seeks to prepare children for life in a multi-religious and multi-secular world. Ethical veganism can be a non-religious worldview: it can stand independent of any religious belief or doctrine. It is also a worldview that can be intertwined with religious belief and practice in the lives of many religious people. It is a practice-based ethical belief system – a way of life which is growing in terms of its influence and popularity in the UK, and in communities and societies across the globe.

At the heart of this unit is an exploration of questions around the moral status of animals and human beings' relationship with the environment: How do humans treat animals and does this align with how they *should* treat them? Do animals have rights? Do world religions support the idea of veganism? Has religion been good or bad for animals? Can veganism be important as a way of life – a practice-based ethical framework for living – connected or unconnected with religion, which reduces suffering? The unit explores responses to these kinds of questions, in age-appropriate ways, from non-religious standpoints and religious standpoints.

The unit sometimes challenges and sometimes supports religious and philosophical convictions and gives students opportunities to deepen and refine their own understanding and viewpoints. The enquiries which make up this unit set challenging standards for students, 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. By contrast, it aims to give learners a clear and accurate understanding of ethical veganism as a recognised philosophical conviction and way of life that is increasingly a feature of our communities in the UK and worldwide.

Where does this unit fit in?

The unit will provide teachers with guidance in planning and delivering up to five RE lessons designed for pupils in upper Key Stage 2 and lower Key Stage 3 (ages 10–12). It crosses the transition phase in the UK between primary and secondary education. Thus, it is ideal for middle schools and could be a part of transition enrichment opportunities. This unit could be used to plan a themed RE day as well. Of course, these lessons can be adapted to suit children of other ages and teachers might wish to alter the content to suit their particular cohorts.

Teachers are encouraged to think about where this unit 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.

Estimated teaching time for this unit: 4–5 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.

The unit will provide these opportunities:

- Students have opportunities to consider a diverse range of views about questions connected to ethical veganism as a religious and non-religious worldview.
- From the study of sources of wisdom and authority, students will be able to examine and develop reasoned viewpoints and thoughtful evaluations of these questions. They will encounter some diverse views about the moral status of animals, human nature and how to make the world a better place, including sources relating to the environment and human health and wellbeing.
- Perspectives from religious and non-religious life and belief will be considered. Some schools may plan to address the questions raised by this unit with reference to other religious traditions, or to limit the range of the perspectives we mention here, taking account of their syllabus for RE and the need for overall balance.
- Students will be able to think about their own views, the influences upon them, and the reasons why they hold them in relation to questions about the moral status of animals and ethical veganism.
- Experiences and opportunities provided by this unit include engaging with a range of views, and pupils will be encouraged to think critically and creatively, as well as to articulate their own views.

KEY THEMES ADDRESSED BY THIS UNIT**Beliefs and concepts:**

- How are animals used by humans? Are we right to use animals in these ways?
- What differentiates species of animals from one another and from us humans, and what is shared?
- How do our perceptions of animals affect the way that they are treated by humans?
- Does everyone have a worldview on animals? (This is the beginning of an exploration of the concepts of speciesism, which may be regarded as hidden worldviews, and sentience as applied to non-human animals.)
- What is ethical veganism and why do some religious and non-religious people live as vegans?
- What matters most to ethical vegans?

ATTITUDES FOCUS

Students will explore attitudes of:

- **Self-awareness** by becoming more aware of the implications of behaviour and ideas about human uses of animals, and scrutinising preconceived ideas relating to animals
- **Open mindedness** by distinguishing between opinions, viewpoints and beliefs with reference to ideas about the moral status of animals

- **Empathy** by considering issues from the perspectives of other people, as well as 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 humans impact on non-human animals and other people, and considering ways to have a positive impact on the lives of human and non-human animals

CONCEPTS: The core concepts from RE that this unit addresses are beliefs, values, meaning and purpose, commitments, and diversity. Teachers should plan to enable learners to see the significance of these core ideas at every point.

Contributions to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students

Opportunities for spiritual development come from:

- Engaging with profound questions about how religious and non-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 a Supreme Being
- Reflecting on and developing their own views in relation to diverse philosophical ideas from religious and secular sources and enabling pupils to think critically about these and to express their own views

Opportunities for moral development come from:

- Exploring and valuing a diversity of views and values on issues relating to veganism as a religious or non-religious worldview
- Asking and answering moral questions: Can adopting a vegan way of living help humanity reduce its contribution to suffering in the world? Do we have moral duties towards non-human animals, and if so what are these duties? Do the ways in which humans use animals in today’s world – especially for food – make sense, morally?
- 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

Opportunities for social development come from:

- Appreciating what is meant by ethical veganism and developing an awareness of the presence of veganism in our communities
- Considering diverse religious and non-religious beliefs and understanding why some people – religious and non-religious – choose to lead a vegan life whilst others do not
- Articulating their own ideas and those of others on a range of contemporary issues and debates around veganism

Opportunities for cultural development come from:

- Exploring the relationship between religious and cultural motivations for adopting a vegan lifestyle
- Thinking about veganism as a cultural identity/phenomenon
- Acquiring an understanding of veganism which promotes respect and combats prejudice and discrimination, and enables pupils to explore how individuals and communities with diverse, and even conflicting worldviews, can coexist and even cooperate with one another in pursuit of common goods
- Promoting inter-cultural understanding whereby pupils are encouraged to reflect upon their own cultural pre-dispositions

Expectations: By the end of this unit, most learners should achieve the following outcomes:		
<p>Make sense of belief:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and explain at least two religious and non-religious perspectives on ethical veganism • Explain a range of religious and non-religious beliefs which lead people to adopt a vegan worldview 	<p>Understand the impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show how some religious and non-religious beliefs and teachings affect how people respond to issues involving use of animals • Give reasons and examples to explain why people have differing views about the value and status of animals and how they should be treated or used 	<p>Make connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast religious and non-religious views on issues relating to veganism and human uses of animals • Evaluate questions relating to the duties of humans towards animals and the environment and to what extent veganism offers a good solution

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

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE FOR PUPILS

This unit can be taught without any specific prior knowledge. A basic knowledge and understanding of Abrahamic and Dharmic religions, as would be expected from standard RE provision, is sufficient. Although not essential, learners will benefit if they have had opportunities to study units 1 and 2 in this series.

SUB-QUESTION: How do humans use animals? Are these uses of animals fair/acceptable?

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):

Ten pictures

Display slide 2 of the Supplementary PowerPoint resource. This shows 10 examples of how humans use animals – slide 3 explains the pictures. Think, pair, share – ask learners, on their own, to think about what all the pictures have in common. Turn to a partner to share ideas. After paired discussion, discuss ideas. There may be different but also correct links between these pictures as well as the answer we are looking for. Praise pupils if they make different but justifiable links.

Discuss that these all show examples of how humans use animals. Explore the connection between the pictures, showing slide 3. The important thing here is that learners consider the variety of ways in which humans use animals and begin to think about the ethical implications of these uses. You may wish to deepen critical thinking by scrutinising the issues raised in the pictures closely. For instance, some images are quite specific, e.g. wearing fur or leather (pictures 1 and 7). You might ask learners to think of other things people might wear that comes from animals, e.g. wool or silk. What makes these different? Why is wearing fur quite controversial, but not leather? Pictures 2 and 4 invite discussion about the different views between people who eat meat, vegetarians and vegans. With reference to picture 5, you might discuss whether zoos are different to safari parks. Are these places where animals are exploited for entertainment purposes or important to foster understanding and research into animals and for conservation? Picture 9 could open a discussion about testing on animals – most people agree in principle that it is less acceptable to do so for household products, cosmetics, etc, but more acceptable for medical advancements. What about animals working? Can pupils think of other ways in which animals work for humans, e.g. police horses, animals pulling carts, ploughs, etc, links with entertainment (picture 3). These are rich grounds for deep discussion that will allow learners to think critically and creatively about these issues, societal norms, and to reflect on their own perspectives.

Cut the pictures with captions on slide 3 into a card-sort. In groups, ask pupils to arrange them onto a spectrum; at one end have 'totally unacceptable' and the other end 'totally acceptable'. An alternative way to do this with the whole class is to make the spectrum physical as a 'human continuum', in which learners take a position along a line across the floor that reflects their view when you hold up one of the images. Select learners at different points of the spectrum to express their views, and other learners can move to different points of the spectrum if they are persuaded by different arguments. Whichever way you present this activity, remind the class that the purpose of discussion is progress, not victory, and that changing your mind is growth, not defeat!

After these discussions, ask pupils to write a reflection, summing up their conclusions. These sentence starters may help:

- As a class we have thought about...
- I think it is acceptable to use animals... because....
- I don't think that using animals for/in.... is acceptable because...
- I understand that other people may disagree with me because....

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

Make sense of belief

- Compare and explain different attitudes towards animals and how they are used for human purposes

Understand the impact:

- Discuss and understand a range of human uses of animals and explain how a person's worldview may influence the ways in which they use or avoid using animals in their own lives
- Reflect on their own views and actions in relation to these issues

Make connections:

- Offer a coherent account of some of the ways in which humans use animals and draw conclusions about

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The discussions made me think more deeply about...• Something that I had never thought about before was...• I changed my mind about...• I didn't change my mind about...• What I liked about discussing these issues was...• What I found difficult, challenging/uncomfortable was...• Overall, I think that the way humans use animals is fair/acceptable/differs depending on the circumstances/something we need to improve on, etc• My main reason for this conclusion is...	<p>whether these are morally acceptable, whilst recognising a range of differing viewpoints</p>
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SUB-QUESTION: Should we treat some animals better than others?

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):

Love them or hate them?

Use mini whiteboards for these activities (scrap paper will do if you don't have whiteboards). Give everyone a whiteboard. Ask them to write down their favourite animal. Hold up the boards and discuss their statements, asking them why they like that particular animal. Ask pupils with less typical animals why they've chosen them. Tot up how many of each animal there are and ask the class what they think of the results. Invite them to ask each other questions.

Ask pupils to write down an animal they really don't like – if they don't dislike any animals, they can sit this one out and think of questions to ask their classmates. Draw out in discussion reasons why they don't like the animals they've written on their whiteboards. Are some of these animals the favourites of others? Are the reasons they don't like them based on facts, past experience or misconceptions, perhaps preferences or dislikes based on religious beliefs. Connect these discussions with prior learning about religions where possible. Remind learners that in Hinduism, for instance, the cow is regarded as special, whereas in Judaism or Islam pigs are regarded as unclean.

What do we know about different types of animals?

Print slides 4 and 5 of the Supplementary PowerPoint resource and cut out the statements on slide 5 (the cheat sheet) to make this a card sort. Challenge pupils to try to work out which facts are about which animal, and which apply to all five. There will be some surprises! Praise the group that gets most cards in the right place. Display the cheat sheet to allow learners to adjust their answers. Discuss reactions – slide 6 has some prompting questions.

You may wish, especially if teaching this unit to lower Key Stage 3, to introduce the concepts of **speciesism** and **sentience**. Supplementary Resource 1 supports this. Speciesism is the idea that humans treat some species of animals differently to others, without good moral reasons for doing so. For instance, as Dr Luke McGuire at University of Exeter says: "Judgements seem to largely depend on the species of the animal in question: dogs are our friends, pigs are food." So, people think of the species of animal in determining what's acceptable in terms of how animals are valued and treated, rather than thinking about the actual characteristics of the animal itself. In fact, pigs and dogs are very similar in many respects, e.g., intelligence, being part of social groups, how they interact with humans and physical similarities. For teachers' reference, a summary of the University's recent study on children's attitudes to different kinds of animals can be seen here: https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/research/title_907430_en.html Sentience is the term used to describe beings that are able to perceive and feel things; e.g., pain, pleasure. These are very difficult concepts, particularly for the lower age ranges for which this unit is designed. It is not necessary that learners are conversant with the technical terms, but rather that they understand that most animals employed for human uses are sentient and that species of animals that are perceived and treated very differently by humans can be very similar in terms of their biological, psychological and even behavioural characteristics.

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 humans use animals in a variety of different ways
- Understand and apply the terms such as 'speciesism' and 'sentience'

Understand the impact:

- Begin to think about how beliefs, values and traditions affect the ways in which animals are perceived by humans, which in turn, influences how different animals are treated

Make connections:

- Assess whether how animals are treated

Comparing humans with other animals

Having considered differences and similarities between species of non-human animals and how they are perceived and treated by humans, this activity invites learners to think about how similar or different humans are to other animals. Give learners, again in groups, a copy of slide 7 of the Supplementary PowerPoint Resource. From the previous activity, identify all the cards that could apply to humans and place them around the outside of the outline of the human figure. Discuss how much or how little humans and other animals seem to have in common. Does this surprise them or not. What else could they add that humans share in common with other animals? Now ask pupils to think about what sets human beings apart from other animals. Write or draw ideas inside the outline of the human figure. Discuss as a class the ideas pupils came up with about what sets humans apart from other animals – there will probably be some differences of opinion.

Does it matter how we treat animals?

Watch this BBC Bitesize video clip, listening very carefully to the religious perspectives expressed: [Does it matter how we treat animals? – KS3 Religious Studies – BBC Bitesize - BBC Bitesize](#). How do some of the religious views compare with learners' own, as expressed in earlier discussions. Asking learners to give a score between 1 and 5 to indicate how far they think it matters how people treat animals, with a reason for choosing the point on the scale can be a simple yet effective way to enable them to express their viewpoint. Encourage learners to make reference to their responses to previous activities in this unit and any relevant prior learning in recording their responses.

Give learners two religions to focus on – perhaps two that feature in your syllabus at this stage – ideally, one Dharmic and one Abrahamic. Maybe you would like learners to choose two religions themselves. Write the question from the video clip at the top of the page. Learners write between three and five bullet points explaining how a person of each religion would answer this question. Extend this activity, by challenging them to write a script of a conversation between two believers, one from each of the religions. A good script should highlight the differences and shared views between the different faith perspectives. A very good script might consider the issue of whether some animals matter more than others, and why. An excellent script will show that people who follow the same religion may have different ideas about whether it matters how we treat animals. You may wish to give learners a list of key words/ideas they should try to include in their script.

- matters, with reference to religious beliefs and teachings
- Think critically about the issues relating to human perception, use and treatment of other animals

SUB-QUESTION: What is the Golden Rule, and should it only apply to human beings?

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.

A Golden Rule

Ask pupils to imagine that there could only be one single rule to live by. It would have to be a rule that would enable everyone to get along and one which aims at making the world a good place to live in. Can they come up with a single rule that would do this? Working in groups, can they propose a rule that would fit the bill? Share ideas with the class, encouraging pupils to think about ways in which the rule could work but also flaws in it as well.

After exchanging a range of ideas, show slide 8 of the Supplementary PowerPoint resource. Tell learners that these are all different versions of the same 'Golden Rule' put in different ways. Ask learners to think about how similar or different their own ideas were about a golden rule. Now, ask them to think of the captions – for each of the quotes – about the 'Golden Rule'? They should spot that it is a feature of many religions and ethical frameworks for living.

Use slide 8 to make a card sort. Ask learners to pick out the versions of the Golden Rule that seem to encompass non-human animals as well. Are there any versions that particularly encourage empathy and compassion for other animals (e.g. C, G) Do any imply that the rule is exclusively for people and not for other animals?

The Golden Rule by Alice, Age 11

Show learners Alice's artwork at first without her written explanation, and just with the title. This is on the cover of this unit and on slide 9 of the Supplementary PowerPoint resource. Invite learners to discuss with a partner what they think Alice is trying to communicate about the Golden Rule. What is it, in her picture, that leads them to have these ideas? Here, learners are scrutinising the picture in the context of their learning. Discuss some ideas as a class and then show Alice's written explanation. How well do the learners' ideas fit in with Alice's intentions as the artist? How might they have communicated these ideas in an artwork? Has Alice done a good job of getting her ideas across in a visual format?

Move on to a discussion of Alice's idea that the Golden Rule *should – but by implication doesn't* – extend to all animals. Do learners agree that the Golden Rule should apply more widely than just to people? Do they agree that this is not the case already?

Think PINC thought experiment

Use slide 10 of the Supplementary PowerPoint resource to set up a 'Think PINC' thought experiment: 'The Golden Rule must apply to all sentient animals'. This works well in groups of three or six, with one or a pair of pupils being positive thinkers (i.e. putting forward reasons why applying the Golden Rule to all sentient animals would be a good idea), one or a pair being the negative thinkers (i.e. identifying the problems and difficulties) and one or a pair being intrigued – raising questions, or neutral/interesting points. You could time the activity, giving time for learners to swap modes of thinking.

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

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

Make sense of belief:

- Understand what is meant by The Golden Rule and be aware that the Golden Rule is expressed in many different ways across religions and cultures
- Understand what is meant by vegan/veganism

Understand the impact:

- Consider the impact of applying The Golden Rule in our interactions and relations with other people
- Consider the impact of applying the Golden Rule outside of the human sphere, including an ethical vegan response to this

Make connections:

- Evaluate how far The Golden Rule should be a moral principle applied to sentient non-human animals
- Show awareness of religious perspectives when evaluating this moral question

Make a rule that each triangle includes reference to religious beliefs, practices or ways of life. After completing the outer 'PIN' triangles, ask groups to formulate a conclusion. Discuss each group's conclusion, as a class.

An ethical vegan perspective: Who are vegans and what might they say about extending the Golden Rule to include animals?

Share the Vegan Society's definition of veganism with the class: veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose'.

Spend some time unpacking the definition. Ask learners what they think this definition means in practice – how would living according to this definition impact on a person's life. Draw on discussions from the preceding thought experiment activity, asking them if the definition of vegan would mean that people need to change certain ways in which they live. Encourage learners to think not only of what a vegan might avoid doing, e.g. eating meat, eggs, dairy, etc, but also what actions as practices they might engage in as well – creative thinking is good. If you have any learners in the class who are vegan or who perhaps have vegan members of their family, allow them to share their experiences if they would like to do so. Read Resource 2 from the Supplementary Resource. Invite questions and stop at the discussion point to think about the practical ramifications of living as a vegan. As you read, ensure that learners know that veganism is not just a diet (although food choices are very important), that it can be a religious or non-religious worldview – and it is diverse, and that it is not about perfection, but about doing a person's best in the choices they make. You might ask learners to write down 3 take-away points about veganism and how vegans might answer the question about whether The Golden Rule should apply to animals.

Sum it all up

Ask pupils to write a blogpost, a rap or a song, or to create a picture with a caption explaining it (like Alice did) summing up what they have learnt in this unit and giving their own view on whether The Golden Rule should apply to animals. Tell learners that a successful piece of work will give clear reasons for any opinions expressed and will show an understanding of religious views as well. Let learners be creative with this work.