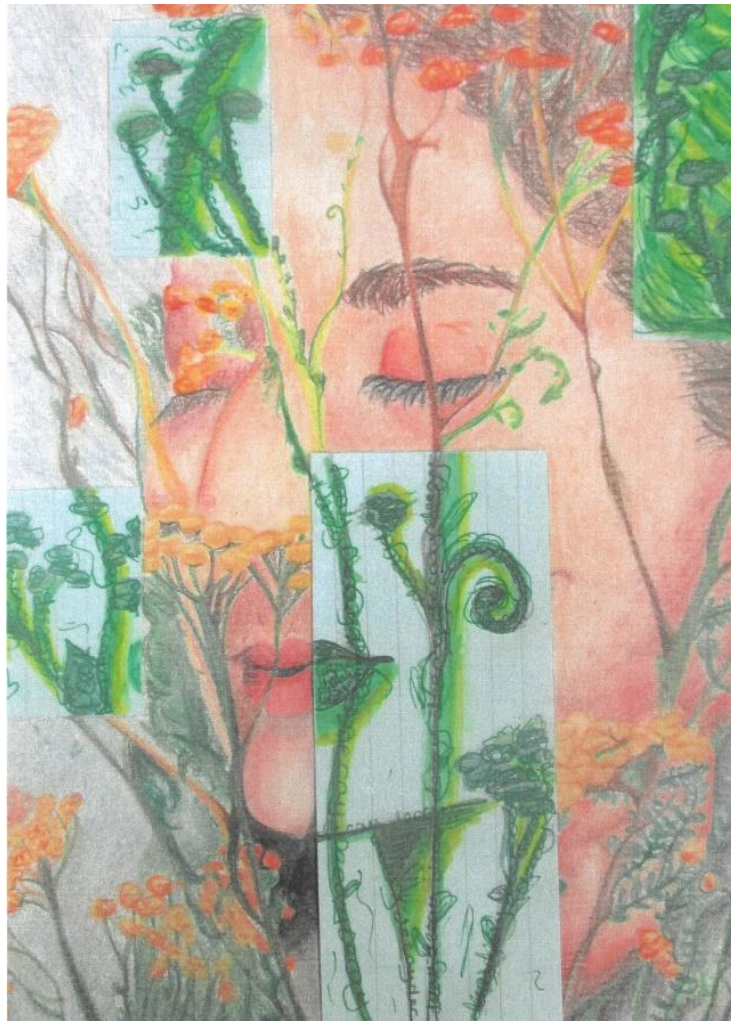


Ethical Veganism in RE Supplementary Resource

Unit 4 (ages 12-14): Who are vegans?



'Personification of Nature'

Mathilda, Age 14

NATRE Art in Heaven, 2021

Note for teachers

Please see also the 'Vegan Voices' files, which are a selected compilation of statements from vegans who responded to the 2021-2022 'Vegan Voices' survey.

Resource 1

Animals: What's my worldview?

Shade one of the blocks for each of the eight statements below to show how you agree or disagree with it. Use the blank speech bubbles on the right as a way to reply to the statement, explaining your own views.

Statement	1 Totally agree	2 Agree to some extent	3 Disagree to some extent	4 Totally disagree	Explain your response
Human beings are superior to animals.					
Some animals, although quite similar biologically, matter less than others. E.g farm animals matter less than those we keep as pets.					
Eating animals is fine – it is natural, normal and necessary for humans to use animals for food.					
Human beings can and should use animals however they want to make life easier and more enjoyable.					
Taking what animals produce for humans to eat or use is fine, e.g. eggs and milk.					
I'm fine with wearing or using things made from real leather.					
I'm fine using or wearing things made from real fur.					
It's fine to keep animals in captivity to entertain us, e.g. the performing whales at Sea World					
I'm happy to use products like shower gel or make-up that have been tested on animals.					
Animals really don't matter to me at all.					

Mostly 1s

Mostly 4s

CARNIST

ETHICAL VEGAN

Carnism

A term coined by the psychologist, Dr Melanie Joy.

Carnism is the worldview which supports the use of animal products, particularly meat.

It is the dominant way of thinking about the use of animals in most societies, which means people don't tend to notice it is their worldview – it's just the norm because they are raised with a carnist outlook and carnist ideas are all around us, e.g. adverts for meat, etc.

Dr Joy argues everyone has a worldview – a set of beliefs and values – around how animals should be used or treated, but not everyone thinks about it, and they may not realise they hold these beliefs or question where they come from.

Ethical Veganism

Ethical vegans believe that it's morally wrong to harm or exploit animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.

Ethical veganism is based on the central belief that exploiting animals is immoral.

Discussion point:

Do we live in a carnist world?

Write your response here. Remember to give examples!

Other worldviews

Worldview	Examples	Do you support this worldview?	Do you think it is a dominant worldview in our society? Give your reasons.
human exceptionalism (anthropocentrism) The belief that humans are superior to all other animals. This leads to always putting human needs and desires above those of other species of animals and the rest of the natural world.			
speciesism¹ Treating members of one species as more important, and more worthy of care and consideration than another, without good moral reasons to do so. It is a form of discrimination.			

¹ Speciesism is a term coined by the psychologist, Dr. Richard Ryder

Resource 2

Famous vegans past and present

Here is some information on ten famous vegans. They are presented in alphabetic order, by surname. For historical figures, the dates that they lived are shown in brackets. Contemporary figures identify as vegan at the time of writing, but teachers are advised to check - worldviews can change! We have attempted to include contemporaries who demonstrate a strong commitment to veganism, who would be unlikely to change their position, but it is always possible that views can alter. Of course, some of these people may be well-known to your learners, whilst others not. The list is intended as a guide and to save teachers time researching. Feel free to be selective and, of course to include your own examples.

The selection is intended to be varied to demonstrate diversity. Historical vegans as well as contemporary figures are included to demonstrate that veganism has a long and varied history. Some might encourage discussion and debate, e.g. St David and Pythagoras. Can we really claim they were vegan?

<p>Al-Ma'arri (973–1057 AD)</p> <p>Famous Arabian poet and philosopher</p>	<p>Al-Ma'arri was an atheist in a Muslim society, so although he was very controversial, his poetry was very famous and widely acclaimed. Childhood smallpox had left him blind. He stood up for social justice and lived a life of seclusion. He was vegan, and wrote a famous poem called, <i>I no longer steal from nature</i>. In it, he says: “Do not desire as food the flesh of slaughtered animals Or the white milk of mothers who intended its pure draught / for their young”</p> <p>The poem, written around a thousand years ago, sets out very aptly the modern vegan worldview. You can read the full poem here: https://mail.all-creatures.org/poetry/ar-steal.html</p>
<p>Patrik Babouminan</p> <p>Record-breaking strongman, psychologist and author</p>	<p>Patrik was once Germany's strongest man and holds the world record for the heaviest yoke carried over 10 metres (555.2 kg / 1,224 lb). He became vegan as he was caring for an injured bird whilst simultaneously eating chicken for dinner. Motivated by compassion for animals, Patrik thought he may compromise his promising athletic career by making the switch to veganism, but actually he went from strength to strength – quite literally!</p>
<p>Mayim Bialik</p> <p>Actor and neuroscientist, most famous for playing Amy Farrah Fowler in the TV comedy, <i>The Big Bang Theory</i></p>	<p>Mayim became vegetarian at the age of 19 in 1994, and made the switch to full veganism after reading Jonathan Safran Foer's 2009 book <i>Eating Animals</i>. Mayim is Jewish and believes that her vegan worldview is very much connected with her religious faith and practice. She has publicised her ways of celebrating Jewish holidays as a vegan family. She is a committed supporter of the organisation Jewish Veg, an international organisation, providing support and advice, connecting Jewish vegans across the globe, and promoting veganism as widely as possible.</p>
<p>St David (500–589AD) Patron Saint of Wales</p>	<p>The term 'vegan' didn't exist in St David's times, but there are lots of sources to support that he lived only on a diet of bread and vegetables. This was not an uncommon religious practice in times gone by. Monks and nuns would often go without fish and meat and sometimes without dairy and eggs as well, for spiritual and religious reasons, rather than concern for animal suffering.</p>

<p>Joaquin Phoenix Hollywood actor</p>	<p>Joaquin has been vegan most of his life. His primary motivation is avoiding cruelty to animals. He uses his platform to encourage the vegan lifestyle, famously speaking out against the meat and dairy industry in his Oscar acceptance speech for the 2019 film, <i>Joker</i>. He famously starred in and was instrumental in the production of the film <i>Earthlings</i>, which brought to the attention of millions the cruelty inflicted on animals used by humans for profit, including the food, entertainment, clothing and pet industries.</p>
<p>Pythagoras (ca. 570 to ca. 490 BCE) Ancient mathematician and philosopher, he was very probably vegetarian and possibly vegan</p>	<p>The term ‘vegan’ didn’t exist in Pythagoras’ time, and we cannot be 100% sure he was vegan by today’s standards. We do know, though, that he did not eat meat or fish, and he believed that all living beings have souls and thus it was wrong to eat them. Up until the eighteenth century, people who ate a vegetarian diet were called ‘pythagorians’</p>
<p>Sadie Sink Actor, famous for playing Max Mayfield in <i>Stranger Things</i></p>	<p>Sadie’s reasons for going vegan mostly surrounded animal welfare: “I did it mainly for the animals, but then also the environment as well. I think a lot of people do it for health reasons also and I think that’s great but I consider that when you’re vegan, the health benefits are a bonus. The most important thing to me is that I’m helping the animals and the environment.” https://www.veganlifemag.com/sadie-sink-stranger-things-veganism/</p>
<p>Thich Naht Hanh (1926–2022) Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist</p>	<p>As a Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Naht Hanh spoke and wrote passionately, arguing that human beings should avoid eating or using animals in ways that cause suffering and death. All of the communities of monks he established were vegan in every respect and visitors are introduced to vegan ways of living at these monasteries. As a Buddhist and peace activist he was concerned with ways to reduce suffering in the world, and being vegan was, he argued, key to this.</p> <p>Thich Naht Hanh encouraged others to become vegan for the animals and for the environment, but he was a pragmatist. He sometimes suggested that people halve their intake of animal-based foods, knowing that the impact of many people doing this could be better than people altogether rejecting the idea of going vegan.</p>

Resource 3

Is it vegan?

Situation/scenario	Vegan?	Your reflections... perhaps suggest alternatives where applicable or what a vegan might do if faced with this situation.
Your friend's dad gives you fish fingers and chips for dinner as he knows you don't eat meat.		
Your aunty has knitted you a lambswool scarf in your favourite colours.		
You need shoes for school. You can't find non-leather ones in the shops so you get second-hand leather shoes from eBay.		
You go to McDonald's with your friends and have the McPlant burger.		
In food tech, you have to cook beef stew next week. Your teacher said he'd rather you didn't cook an alternative as the class is learning how to cook meat – you might not always be vegan, it's probably just a phase and you'll need this skill in the future.		
You're on your dream family holiday to Florida. Your mum has booked a trip to Sea World. She can't wait for you all to see the whale show!		
You are on an animal rights march, giving out leaflets and talking about how to go vegan		
You're terrified of spiders. One lands next to you, so you squish it with a big book.		
You really want a labradoodle. You find a breeder that has pups from prize-winning parents. It's expensive, but worth the money!		
You have been invited to go to the Grand National – the famous horse race.		
There's an amazing new range of fragrances out. Everyone has them. You can't find anywhere on the package that says they don't contain animal ingredients or whether they're tested on animals, so you buy some.		
Your friends are going to the zoo for a day out and they want you to join them as well.		
You're unwell and the doctor has given you medicine that you need to take to get better. All medicine has to be tested on animals by law and the medicine you need contains lactose, from cows' milk as well.		

Suggested responses and discussion points

Please note that there will be points on which vegans may differ on some of these issues.

Situation/scenario	Vegan?	Your reflections... perhaps suggest alternatives where applicable or what a vegan might do if faced with this situation.
Your friend's dad gives you fish fingers and chips for dinner as he knows you don't eat meat.	NO	Fish is never vegan. Most vegans would not eat it. Politely explaining would avoid future awkwardness.
Your aunty has knitted you a lambswool scarf in your favourite colours.	NO	It's not vegan to wear or use wool.
You need shoes for school. You can't find non-leather ones in the shops, so you get second-hand leather shoes from eBay.	NO	It is not vegan to buy second-hand leather, but some people who are vegan will do this as they say it is more sustainable, environmentally, than buying newly produced vegan products. Others will say it is disrespectful to the animal to wear his or her skin and that buying leather from charity shops normalises the use of animal skins as clothing. You might wish to discuss if it would make a difference if it were a second-hand fur coat, or a second-hand woollen item.
You go to McDonald's with your friends and have the McPlant burger.	YES	The McPlant is 100% plant-based and approved by the Vegan Society. However, some vegans would say that buying food from a company like McDonald's whose main product and source of profit is meat is not technically vegan. Others see vegan-friendly options in fast food chains like McDonald's and KFC as helping people become and stay vegan, especially young people.
In food tech, you have to cook beef stew next week. Your teacher said he'd rather you didn't cook an alternative as the class is learning how to cook meat – you might not always be vegan, it's probably just a phase and you'll need this skill in the future.	NO	The teacher should make allowances for philosophical beliefs. Ethical veganism is a protected belief under the Equality Act 2010. Note that the teacher is not insisting that the pupil cooks meat but is saying he would rather they did. Suggesting that a philosophical belief system such as ethical veganism is a phase is totally inappropriate. The pupil is entitled to cook a vegan alternative.
You're on your dream family holiday to Florida. Your mum has booked a trip to Sea World. She can't wait for you all to see the whale show!	NO	Paying to see animals in captivity performing is regarded by vegans as a form of exploitation.
You are on an animal rights march, giving out leaflets and talking about how to go vegan	YES	Some vegans actually say that peaceful activism and advocating for animals is part of being vegan and you can't be vegan without this. This doesn't form part of the Vegan Society definition of veganism though.
You're terrified of spiders. One lands next to you, so you squish it with a big book.	NO	Killing animals, however small, is not vegan. It is actually a form of speciesism. People might kill a spider but not a butterfly for instance. It would be different if there was a serious threat. If the spider was a dangerous poisonous breed and the only way to ensure safety was to kill it, then this may be acceptable.
You really want a labradoodle. You find a breeder that has pups from prize-winning parents. It's expensive but worth the money!	NO	Pet ownership is widely debated within vegan circles. It is generally agreed that buying animals from breeders is not vegan as it is commodifying animals, and all sorts of welfare issues arise from it as well. Some vegans are opposed to any form of pet ownership. There is wide agreement that it is acceptable according to vegan principles to re-home an animal from a shelter. Many vegans refer to pets as 'companion animals' as it is less suggestive of an owner/property relation.
You have been invited to go to the Grand National – the famous horse race.	NO	Horse racing is regarded as a form of exploitation. There are significant concerns with races like the Grand National where fences are high, and horses fall and are then euthanised. There are many other issues around 'breaking' horses, breeding, end of career killing of horses, etc. Most, but not all, vegans are opposed to horse riding altogether.
There's an amazing new range of fragrances out. Everyone has them. You can't find anywhere on the package that says they don't contain animal ingredients or whether they're tested on animals, so you buy some.	NO	Most vegans would say that we have a responsibility to do due diligence and find out whether the products we buy are free from animal derivatives and cruelty free as well. Simply not checking and assuming is not fulfilling the mission to reduce animal suffering and exploitation whenever possible.
Your friends are going to the zoo for a day out and they want you to join them as well.	NO	Although it can be argued that zoos do some good conservation work and education programmes, most vegans are not comfortable with watching captive animals for entertainment. This applies to Safari Parks as well. A vegan would prefer to visit a farm sanctuary where animals are rescued from the threat of slaughter, etc.
You're unwell and the doctor has given you medicine that you need to take to get better. All medicine has to be tested on animals by law and the medicine you need contains lactose, from milk as well.	YES	If you need medication, it is not against vegan principles to take it, even if it contains non-vegan ingredients. Vegans might ask for tablets instead of capsules made out of gelatine shells, but lactose from milk is present in most oral medication. If there is no alternative, and you must have it to restore good health, then it is still within the principles of veganism.

Resource 4

Vegan Voices Survey

We conducted a small survey to find out more about vegans. 229 people who identify as vegan responded. Mostly, they were living in the UK, but we had responses from other countries around the world as well. Here are some of the results.

Most people surveyed (over 80% of them) had been vegan for at least three years. Nearly half of them had been vegan for at least six years. Over a quarter had been vegan for at least 10 years.

None of the people in our survey had been raised vegan by their parents or carers, and only one person had made the choice to become vegan when they were a child. 11 people (that's 4.8%) became vegan as teenagers. So, a large majority of the people who answered our survey had chosen veganism in adulthood (after turning 18).

Why do people become vegan?

According to our survey, here are the top 4 reasons why people choose to be vegan. They are in rank order:

1. Concern for animal suffering
2. Concern for the environment
3. Concern for personal health
4. Religious teachings/beliefs

Other reasons stated were social justice/workers' rights and public health (for instance, some people mentioned that factory farms create the conditions for diseases that spread among the animals and then to people, such as swine flu or bird flu – these diseases have the potential to become pandemics).

Are vegans religious or non-religious?

We know that vegans may be religious or non-religious, but what did our survey find?

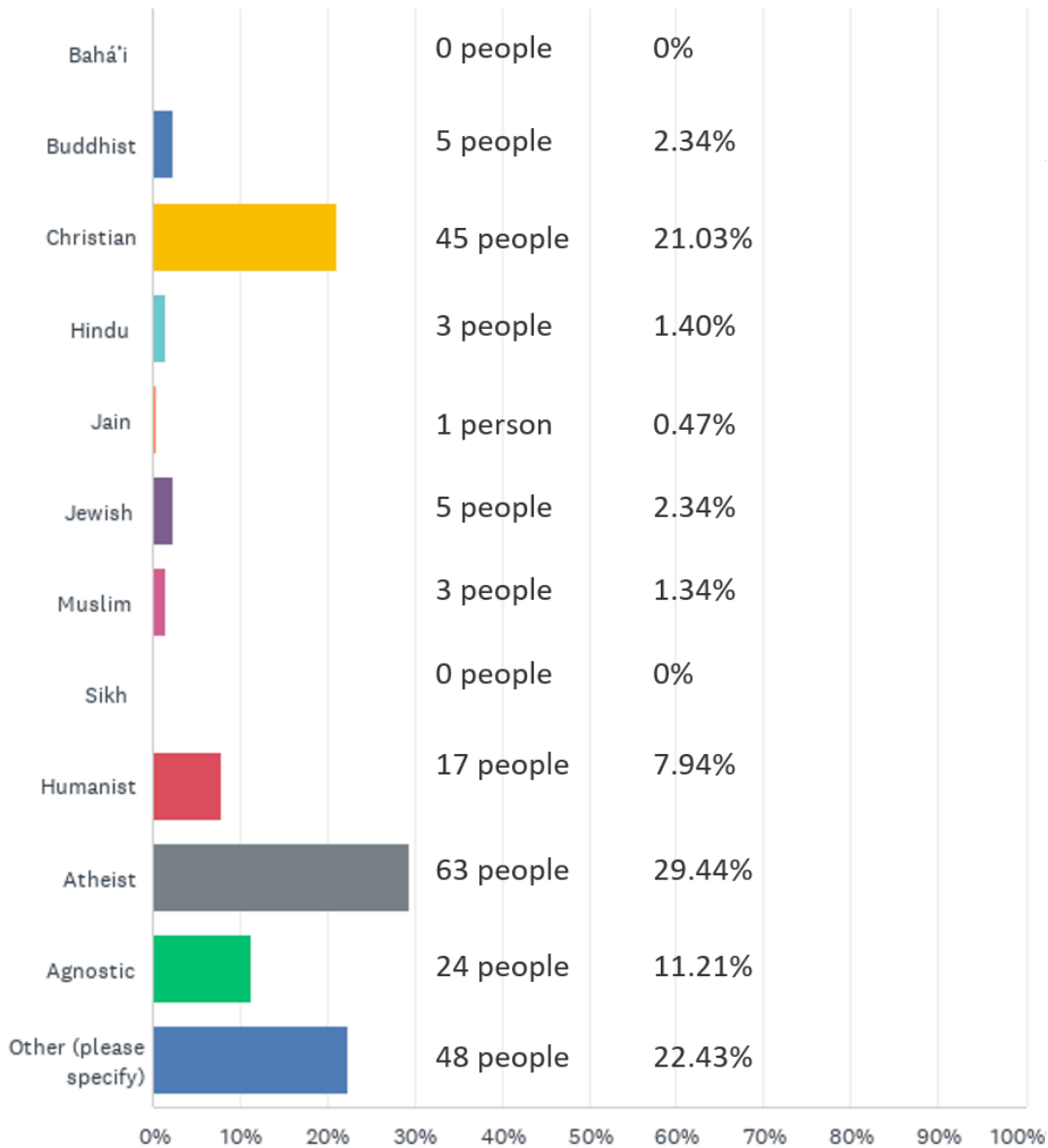
59 of the vegans who answered our survey considered themselves to be religious to some extent – that's about a quarter.

67 vegans said that they consider themselves to be spiritual, but not religious (SBNR) – that's almost 30%

89 vegans said they are not at all religious – about 39%

With what religions or worldviews did the vegans in our survey identify?

Some people chose to skip this question, but 214 out of 229 did answer. Take a look at the results:



There was a range of different responses from the 48 people who chose 'other'. Some people told us that they identified as a religion or worldview not listed in our survey. Others said that they could not commit to just one religion or worldview, seeing their beliefs and ways of life as being influenced by more than one religion/worldview. Others felt that whilst not any longer being part of the religion they were raised with, they were still influenced by its values and teachings.

Real Vegan Voices

We have compiled a wide-ranging selection of statements made by the vegans who responded to our survey. The statements articulate the personal views and perspectives of the individuals involved. They are offered as stimuli to engage learners in critical thinking, discussion, and debate and as a way to encourage further research and exploration by learners, and perhaps teachers, too.

Taken together, there are 47 statements in our compilation. They are grouped broadly by religion/worldview so that teachers can make selections, perhaps according to the religions and worldviews they are teaching at the time, following their usual syllabus. Feel free to be selective to accommodate the educational needs of your learners. They are arranged so that teachers can be creative and flexible in how they present them to classes. For instance, teachers may wish to cut them into individual statement cards and use some of them in card-sort activities.

Most of the religions typically taught in RE are represented. Numbers vary greatly according to the number of responses we received. There is a separate PDF document for each, as summarised below.

Religion/worldview	Vegan Voices Resource	Number of statements
Buddhists	4.2.1	4
Christians	4.2.2	20
Hindus	4.2.3	3
Jewish people	4.2.4	4
Muslims	4.2.5	3
Other religions/spiritualities	4.2.6	5
Non-religious people	4.2.7	8

We hope that these statements provide learners with on-paper introductions to real-life vegan people from many walks of life. From these statements, learners will see that vegan worldviews can be diverse. They will get a flavour of some of the benefits and challenges of living as a vegan. Importantly, they will see that veganism is a complex worldview, regarded by some as a non-religious philosophical conviction, and by others as inextricably woven into their religious identity.

As you will see from many of the statements, a big challenge for some vegans relates to prejudice, unfair stereotyping and misconceptions of veganism and vegans as people. It is worth reminding learners that ethical veganism is recognised and protected as a philosophical belief under the Equality Act 2010. RE lessons provide an ideal context to address issues of prejudice and discrimination, and help learners towards a critical, informed, objective and empathetic understanding of people who choose to be vegan. Introducing learners to authentic vegan voices we hope will enable this, as well as aiding them to formulate and express viewpoints of their own.

Resource 5

Target Board Group Activity

What matters most to ethical vegans?

Use the target board for this group activity which aims to enable learners to sort and rank, thoughtfully, some priorities for ethical vegans.

Give groups the 20 items below, cut out on cards. Ask them to place them on the target board in this pattern:

- 1 in the centre – this is the one that matters most
- 3 in the next circle – these matter very much
- 5 in the next circle – these matter a lot
- 7 in the fourth circle – these do matter
- Left over for the outer circle – these matter less (comparatively).

Pupils could play this as a game, taking turns to set down a card, or moving a to a different position.

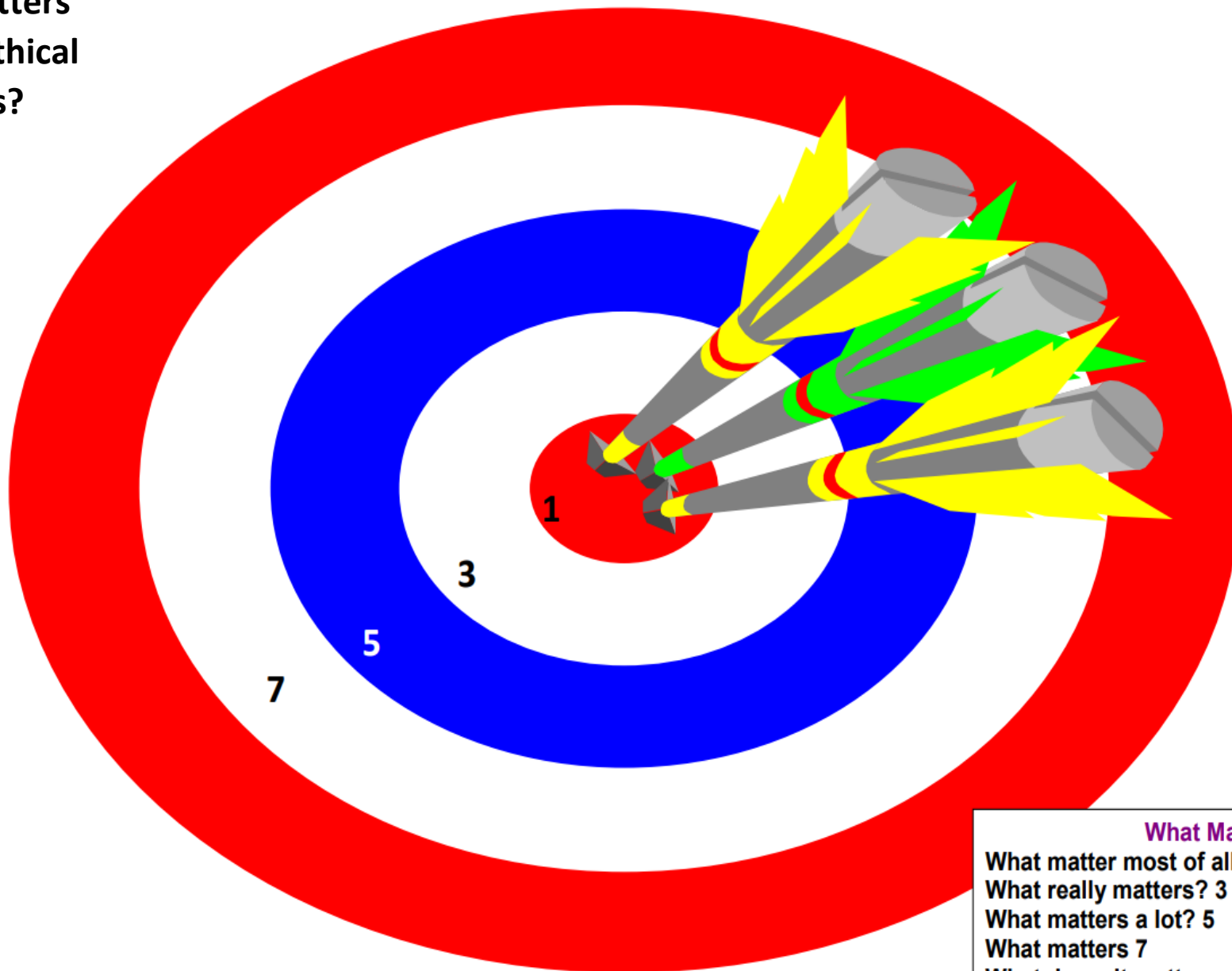
The activity encourages thought about what really matters in a religion or worldview – in this case, ethical veganism – but there is not a definitive set of answers.

This activity works best after some thorough study. It is a good summative assessment task.

What matters most to ethical vegans?

The Golden Rule	All sentient animals	Personal health	Persuading others to be vegan	Availability of vegan food
What other people think or say about them	Religious or philosophical teachings	Challenging carnism	Challenging speciesism	Challenging human exceptionalism (anthropocentrism)
The environment	Public health (the health of humans as a whole)	Social justice for human beings	Non-violence	Being an activist
Being part of a vegan community	Feeling that veganism helps	Ending factory farming	Being able to socialise	Raising awareness

**What matters
most to ethical
vegans?**



What Matters?
What matter most of all? 1
What really matters? 3
What matters a lot? 5
What matters 7
What doesn't matter much?