



**Animal Welfare:  
A Key Component of  
Social Justice**

**BCSPCA**

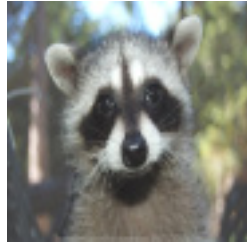
## **Contact Information**

**Paula Neuman  
Humane Education Manager, BC SPCA  
1245 East 7th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5T 1R1  
604-647-5505  
[pneuman@spca.bc.ca](mailto:pneuman@spca.bc.ca)**

# **Why animals are a key component of social justice.**

Animals are vulnerable beings in that they are subjected to situations beyond their control. Using animals as a bridge to discuss social justice issues can be a way to ease students into more sensitive and personal social justice issues such as racism and stereotyping.

Included in this handout are some outlined activities and discussion questions that should get the conversation started. These are designed to encourage students to think critically about where their beliefs and ideas come from and help them in their future discussions about issues involving people in society, as well as give them a chance to reflect on their own views on animals.



## Animal Welfare:

### Introduction to Stereotypes and Understanding the Influences on our Beliefs.

The following activity and discussion will help students:

1. Assess how belief systems can affect perspectives and decisions
2. Assess how their own attitudes and behaviours are influenced and developed

List five animals that people typically like and five they don't like. (i.e. dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, bears vs. pigs, snakes, rats, skunks, chickens).

Ask students to stand up if they like or dislike each animal.

In groups, have students discuss why they like and don't like these animals.

Discuss what influences our attitudes towards animals? (i.e. personal experience, media, stories, families, culture) Write these on the board and compare these influences to stereotypes associated with certain groups of people.

#### BREED BANS/STEREOTYPES:

There is much discussion in the media on dog breed bans and vicious dogs. Discuss the following questions:

Do all dog bites get media attention or are certain breeds more likely to make the news? Why? Do we stereotype certain breeds of dogs? Why? Do all dogs of these breeds have the same temperament? Is there any similarity to stereotyping certain groups of people?

Do stereotypes have any consequences for dogs/people?

What other animals do we stereotype?

Discuss some other reasons we may stereotype certain animals. Discuss how one feature of an animal (i.e. size of pigs) may determine our attitude towards that animal versus looking at all features (i.e. intelligence of pigs).

List some phrases that include animals. (i.e. fat as a pig). Do these contribute to our attitudes towards certain animals?

How are animals portrayed in story books? Kids movies? Does this influence our attitudes?



## Animals in our Society

The following discussion and activity will help students

1. Think critically about how and why society values animals
2. Think critically about how values are placed on people
3. Think critically about how products are marketed

Show students pictures of various animals from wildlife to small animals. Ask students to describe how each of the animals are part of the web of life on earth. Ask students, do we value all animals equally? Why or why not?

Why do we treat some animals differently than others (i.e. pets vs. animals for food vs. wildlife)?

What euphemisms do we use for animals we eat? Why?

Is it OK for people in other countries to eat animals we consider pets? Why or why not?

Are there any negative effects on society from placing a lesser value on some animals than others?

Do we value people's professions differently in society (i.e. doctors vs custodians)?

Should all professions be valued?

Under what conditions are most animals raised for food? What behaviours can't these animals express because of how they are kept? What behaviours can they express? Is this good animal welfare? What about people who work in factories in horrible conditions? Are there behaviours that they can't perform? Is this a human rights issue?

### MEDIA LITERACY:

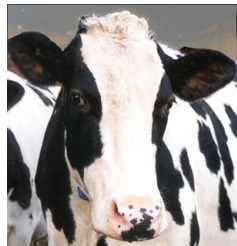
Explore how the food industry promotes its products. ([www.dairygoodness.ca](http://www.dairygoodness.ca))

Is the health of the animal enough to determine if there is good animal welfare?

What issues are not being addressed?

Why has the food industry moved from small family farms to large more automated farms?

We tend to see pets as individuals and farm animals as groups. Does this have any effect on how we treat animals?



Why do sports teams choose certain animals to name their team?  
Does this affect stereotypes?

## Animal Welfare: Understanding the Terms and Discovering the Issues

The following discussion and activity will help students:

1. Understand the concepts and terms related to animal welfare.
2. Analyze scenarios in which animal welfare is compromised and the roles played by industry, government and general societal views.

Discuss the terms **animal welfare** and **animal rights** with students.

**animal welfare:** The moral or ethical position that the use of animals for human purposes is justified as long as their welfare is ensured.

**animal rights:** The moral or ethical position that animals are not to be exploited for human purposes, that animals are not human property, and that animals should be treated as the moral equals of humans.

List four ways we use animals in our society: (companions, entertainment, food, research). Ask students to list the types of animals used in each category.

Choose an animal that is used by humans for food or research or kept in a zoo or aquarium. Have students research the animal's behaviour, habitat, food source and socialization in its natural/wild setting.

Next, ask students to compare the behaviour, habitat, food source and socialization of the same animal in an industrialized or confined setting such as a farm, zoo, aquarium, research centre, etc.

Has the animal's life been compromised or benefited? How?

Have humans benefited from this? How?

### **Empathy Journal:**

Have students write an entry in their empathy journal from the point of view of the animal they chose

**Review the following statement:**

The misuse of power and socially accepted norms of oppression are the basis for social injustice. Including animals in the social justice curriculum expands the circle of compassion which is what is needed to have a socially just society.

Do you agree that animal welfare must be addressed in order to have a socially just society? Why or why not?

Should animals have rights? Why or why not?

Should they be equal to human rights? Why or why not?