



THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMANE EDUCATION
P.O. BOX 260
SURRY, MAINE 04684
207.667.1025
info@HumaneEducation.org
www.HumaneEducation.org

WHAT IS A HUMANE LIFE?

Grades: 5 and up

Time: 90-120 minutes

Materials: Mat board or poster board (scraps are available free from most frame shops) with pertinent statistics and facts written on them; props and products that you use in your daily life, plus containers from products you don't use (available at local recycling centers), or (for teachers asking for assistance in creating a humane life) a variety of products, some more humane and sustainable than others; a black/white board & chalk/markers

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Language Arts, Science, and, with modifications, Mathematics

Pertinent Information: This lively and interactive class can be offered in two different ways. In the first – **Humane Presenter** or **HP** -- the teacher models a day in her/his own life as a representative of people consciously trying to live a humane and sustainable lifestyle. This approach works well for visiting humane educators and substitute teachers who are offering a single presentation to the students. In the alternative approach -- **Humane Wannabe** or **HW** -- the teacher represents someone who would like to lead a more humane and sustainable life but does not know how to and is relying upon the students to provide suggestions and counsel.

Note: If you are going to present this program modeling your own life, it is essential that you accurately share *your* lifestyle, not the lifestyle of the most humane person you can imagine, or the person you want to be in five years (or who you were five years ago). Your honesty and efforts to grow and change, and to live more compassionately and sustainably, are important elements in the integrity of this presentation.

1. Invite the class to join you for a typical Saturday. In the **HP** version, ask the students to think about what the word *humane* means to them (tell them that the word literally means “having what are considered the best qualities of human beings”), and explain that your day reflects a way of living that has slowly evolved for you as you have learned all the ways that your lifestyle choices affect other species, your own health, other people, and the earth. Explain that you try to live a life that harms others as little as possible and that you are continually changing and growing. You might want to tell the students that if you had done this program five years ago, it might have been less

humane, and that if you were to do it in five years, you hope it would be even more humane and sustainable.

Ask the students to constantly be thinking about the reasons why you've chosen certain products or made certain lifestyle decisions and to always ask themselves the following questions:

- a. Which is more humane for you, the presenter?
- b. Which is more humane for communities of people?
- c. Which is more humane for the environment?
- d. Which is more humane for other animals?

Write these criteria on the blackboard, and throughout the program ask the students whether, in light of the four criteria, an action or product is humane.

In the **HW** version, tell the students that you want to figure out how to lead a more humane life and would like their help. Invite them to suggest choices that are healthier for you and more respectful to other people, other animals, and the environment.

2. Pass around facts and statistics. In the **HP** version, provide each student with properly cited facts and statistics that they can read aloud to explain some of your choices. In the **HW** version, provide each student with properly cited facts and statistics that will help them assess your choices and make recommendations to you for living a more humane life. In both versions, invite students to read their statistics or facts to themselves, and remind them to be ready to share them aloud when they are relevant to your typical Saturday. You may want to collect facts and statistics about the following issues (See our Resources section.):

- water use
- product testing
- diet and agriculture
- genetic engineering of crops
- sources of pollution
- reasons for habitat destruction
- sweatshop and slave labor use in the manufacture of common products
- fossil fuel and resource use for various activities

3. Begin your day. In the **HP** version, share the products you use in the morning (soap, toothpaste, and so on) in a lively way (for example by taking a mock shower with a shower curtain held by student volunteers and water noises made by the class) and invite students to read aloud pertinent facts or statistics that relate to your choice of products. In the **HW** version, you might describe what you do in the morning (brush your teeth, wash your face), and ask students to share pertinent facts or statistics. Also ask them to look through the various products you've brought to make recommendations about which ones to use and which ones to avoid.

4. Have breakfast. In the **HP** version, explain, in light of the criteria of humane living, why you have chosen particular foods. Invite students to share pertinent facts and statistics. In the **HW** version, ask students to share relevant facts and statistics and make recommendations about what you might eat, and then perhaps to give you some food in your bowl and a cloth napkin to use (as opposed to the paper napkin that is also one of your props).

5. Other aspects of the day to consider:

- what to wear
- how to spend leisure time (e.g., shopping, playing with friends, watching TV, engaging in outdoor activities)
- how to help others (through volunteerism or activism)
- how to accomplish such chores as house cleaning or laundry in a humane way
- how to get where you want to go (i.e., what forms of transportation to use)

For each of these topics, have available pertinent objects and materials to choose from (e.g., fair-trade, organic clothing and chain store clothing; conventional cleaning products and baking soda and white vinegar), as well as pertinent facts and statistics to help students advise you on your choices. Make your activities as lively as possible!

6. In the **HP** version, invite students to think about their own lives and to consider what changes they might want to make. Remind them that every humane choice they make matters. In the **HW** version, thank the students for providing suggestions and ideas for making your life more eco-friendly, and lead a discussion about how you and they might each begin to make more humane choices now that you all have more information.

Activity from *The Power and Promise of Humane Education*