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ALIEN IN THE ETHICAL UNIVERSE

Grades: 5 through 8

Time: 20-45 minutes

Materials: Alien question sheets

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, Language Arts, and History

Pertinent Information: When doing this activity, you can pretend that you have a friend who is traveling through the universe on a fact-finding mission in order to learn how different beings behave on different planets. S/he is visiting Earth, and you've brought her/him with you to talk to the students because s/he loves asking young people their views, since they tend to be very forthright and honest. You can explain that on her/his planet all beings are treated equally, with respect and compassion, and that s/he wants to know the rules on planet Earth so s/he won't offend anyone. You can also explain that because her/his planet is so far away, s/he travels in the form of energy and will occupy your body to speak to the students. Ask if the class is willing to answer her/his questions and close your eyes to let her/him "enter your body," -- and when you open your eyes, it is the alien who addresses the class.

Alternative: Another way to conduct this activity is to divide the class into groups of five, to ask one member of the group to play the alien who will ask a series of questions to the others in the group, and to record the answers on a piece of paper.

Each subject question has four parts:

- 1) How are you supposed to treat _____?
- 2) Is it ever okay to harm _____?
- 3) Why or why not?
- 4) Do people generally treat _____ respectfully?

In relation to humans, your list can include:

- people with a different skin color
- elderly people
- men/women
- people with disabilities
- people with a different religion

- people who are mentally ill
- people who are poor/people who are rich and powerful
- short people/tall people/fat people/skinny people
- people with brown eyes/blue eyes/hazel eyes/green eyes/pink eyes

and so on.

In relation to animals, your list can include:

- animals in general
- birds in general/specific birds such as sparrows, eagles or chickens
- mammals in general/specific mammals such as dogs, cats, pigs, horses, or coyotes
- fishes
- reptiles
- amphibians
- insects

and so on.

Most of the time, students express the view that we should treat others with respect, but as the “alien” delves deeper, prejudices such as racism, sexism, jingoism, etc., come to light. In relation to animals, the discussion will bring out the inconsistencies in our treatment of different species.

When the students have completed the question-and-answer segment, facilitate a discussion about the inconsistencies, complexities, and confusing aspects of our behaviors and morals. Why do we profess certain values but do not always act accordingly? This discussion about the inconsistencies of our values and actions is the purpose of the activity and sets the stage for further activities that help students put their values into practice more consistently in their day-to-day lives.

Activity from *The Power and Promise of Humane Education*