Should we eat meat?

AGE RANGE: Secondary

Should we eat meat?

KEY CONCEPT:

Vegetarianism

KEY WORDS:

Vegetarian, plant-eating, vegetables, vegan, fruitarian, herbivorous, animal produce, beliefs, morality, ethics, health, nutrition, animal welfare, choice, agriculture, industry, tradition, demand, culture, consumption, energy and production.

SUBJECT AREA RELEVANCE:

Science, PHSCE

USEFUL PRIOR LEARNING:

To engage with this lesson students need to know and potentially understand what a vegetarianism is.

LEARNING INTENTION:

To be able to decide if we should or shouldn't eat meat.

SUCCESS CRITERIA:

We can

• Discuss and explore the concept of vegetarianism.

• Explore the reasons why people choose to become vegetarian.

• Examine and evaluate a range of evidence which supports and opposes the idea of eating meat.

• Decide if we should eat meat, using evidence to support our point of view.

STRATEGY USED:

Venn Diagram

1. Identify Important Concepts:

Some of the key areas to investigate within and around the concept of 'vegetarianism' are the following:

- Healthy eating, food and nutrition
- The agricultural industry
- Moral and ethical views on meat consumption
- Animal cruelty and welfare
- Animals and religion
- History of domesticated animals
- Industrial farming
- Choice
- Global warming
- Survival
- Animal rearing and land use
- Animal farming and energy use

2. Challenge Students' Understanding Of The Concept:

Here are some examples of cognitive conflict we expect your students to experience:

Opinion	Conflicting opinion
Becoming vegetarian is necessary if we care about animals and their welfare.	I eat meat but I still care about animals and their welfare.
Our meat consumption causes pain and suffering to many animals and it needs to stop.	Many animals are killed in a humane and respectful manner. I buy my meat from a local farm where the animals live in a good environment.
If I became vegetarian to protest against the suffering of animals, it wouldn't make any difference to the current farming system or the meat industry.	We have a moral obligation to do the right thing and the smallest of acts can create a revolution.
Many say our body is designed to eat meat and therefore it is natural that we should still consume meat products.	Just because our bodies can digest meat doesn't make the process ethically right. We have a choice.
When we were hunter-gatherers, we needed meat in our diets in times of scarcity. We no longer have the same issues and there are many alternatives to meat.	Most people on the planet are no longer hunter-gatherers but meat continues to play an important and irreplaceable part in many popular food dishes and cuisines.

Indigenous people in hot or cold arid environments have very little choice but to eat meat.	The ingenuity of humans means that there are always alternative ways to produce plant-based crops or find alternatives to meat.
Humans have been killing animals for food for millions of years. Eating meat is part of our heritage which we should retain and celebrate.	We should not continue an action or behaviour just because it has always happened. We have implemented laws to regulate and stop traditions which have come to be regarded as barbaric.
The more animal foods we eat, the more heart disease, cancers and other degenerative disease we suffer. Becoming vegetarians will make us healthier.	Good quality meat has many nutrients that are good such as protein, vitamin B12, creatine, carnosine and important fat-soluble vitamins.

Questions for challenge

- What is vegetarianism?

- Why would someone decide to become vegetarian?

- How do we know if we should become vegetarian?

- Would you be a more caring person if you became vegetarian?

- Who should decide if we should or shouldn't become a vegetarian?

- Can anyone choose to become vegetarian?

- Should we become vegetarian if our parents and friends are?

- Should we become vegetarian if we love animals?

- How is it possible to love animals and still eat meat?

- Should people who have pets be vegetarian?

- Should we always have a right to choose what we eat?

- To what extent do we have a right to eat meat?

- When don't we have a right to eat meat?

- What if no one ate meat?

- Is our existence and survival always more important than that of animals?

- Is becoming vegetarian always a moral choice?

- How does being vegetarian help?

- Many say our ancestors ate meat and therefore it is part of who we are. To what extent is this still relevant?

- To what extent would you be justified in consuming meat if you knew it keeps people in employment?

- Can we always justify our consumption of meat if it helps us control the population numbers of wild animals such as rabbits?

- What's the difference between vegetarianism and veganism?

- If you are a vegetarian for animal welfare reasons should you also be a vegan?

- If animals have always suffered because of our need for meat, why haven't we changed our eating habits before this?

- Why do we only eat the meat of certain animals?

- Who decides which animals we should eat?

- What is the connection between religion and eating meat?

- Are the needs of people for cheap, safe and healthy food more important than the rights of animals?

- What's the difference between a pet and a farm animal?

- Some animal breeds only exist because of the meat industry. What are the implications of this when we think about vegetarianism?

- Is it ever OK to treat animals as a resource?

- What is the moral or ethical difference between eating meat bought in a shop and eating meat that you have hunted and killed yourself?

- If you're going to kill an animal, does it really matter how you treat it while it is alive?

3. Construct Understanding:

Activity 1: Sorting and Classifying using a Venn Diagram

Sorting and Classifying are every day, often unconscious skills that we use to organise information and ideas.

These are basic cognitive skills needed by all human beings to recognise similarities and differences through seeing common features, developing awareness of concepts and making links between them. Sorting and Classifying helps students to make sense of the world around them.

Venn Diagrams are great visual tools for thinking and effectively support the process of Sorting and Classifying.

Ask your students to sort and classify the **Activity 1 resource cards** into two categories as shown below:

Reasons we should eat meat   Reasons we shouldn't eat meat
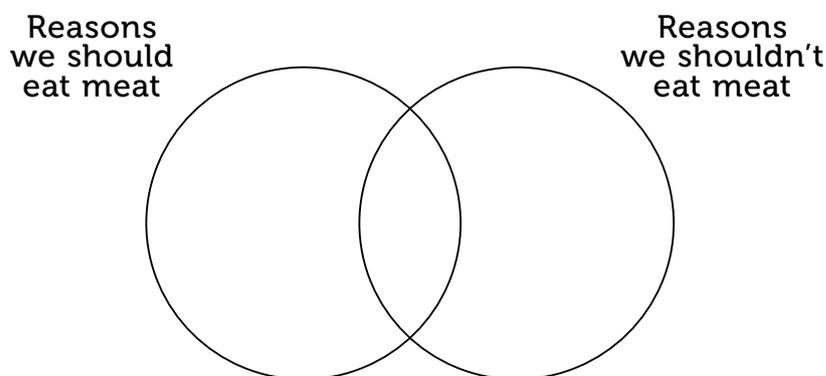
The Venn Diagram activity can be completed on paper but students often engage fully when the process is more kinaesthetic and coloured hoops can be used.

Only when the students discover that some objects can go into both hoops, should you suggest that the hoops could be overlapping to take this into account.

Once students have sorted through the cards, they can explore and share the criteria used to classify the images into the relevant piles. The criteria could be shared on the white board with contributions from the class.

It is often useful to assist the students when they are sorting through the information in front of them. This can help them interpret and handle the information more easily and reconstruct their thinking in order to reach an understanding.

Challenging LEARNING

Adaptation

Provide a smaller and more personalised selection of cards for Activity 1.

Provide additional support for students by reading through the cards and defining difficult terms.

Extension

It would be beneficial for your students to conduct further research on the issues surrounding vegetarianism, examining the historical, financial and ethical perspectives.

Ask your students to write an article or letter for their local newspaper where they present their opinion on whether we should or shouldn't eat meat.

4. Consider The Learning Journey:

At the end of the activity it is worthwhile to encourage the students to review their learning journey and the thinking process they have participated in throughout the lesson.

This can consist of reflection on the thinking that has taken place by summarising and concluding on their newfound understanding.

Explicit reference to Learning Intentions and Success Criteria is a good starting point for this reflection but it is also helpful to consider some of the following questions:

- Do you have a deeper or better understanding of the concept vegetarianism?
- Which parts of the lesson helped you to examine your attitude to vegetarianism?
- Should we always have a right to choose what we eat?
- Is becoming vegetarian always a moral choice?
- What questions do you still have?
- What would you like to investigate further?
- How could your thinking and reasoning around this concept be helpful to you beyond this lesson?

To encourage the students to review their learning journey and their thinking progress, students provide a case and reasoning for the key question:

Should we eat meat?

Each student or group presents an argument to the rest of the class on their choice. They could be asked to support their argument with 3 key reasons that can be supported by evidence. The other groups could have opportunities to question the reasoning given.

Ideas for transfer

Ask your students to explore the comparisons between land use and energy inputs between plant-based and meat-based farming.

Ask your students to explore legislation and animal welfare standards within the meat industry in their own country.

Ask your students to explore the latest research the impact of plant-based and meat-based diets on human health, performance and well-being.

Mass rearing of animals is a way of producing more food, so more people can be fed.

Killing human animals is not okay, however killing other species is fine because they are less intelligent.

Rearing animals as a food source is selfish — why should animals suffer just to give us cheap food?

Intensive animal farming is degrading. All living things should be treated with respect.

Unlike many other animals who kill for their food, humans can survive on a completely plant based diet. Our understanding has evolved, and, in the process, we have come to learn that eating animals is no longer the necessity we once believed it to be.

If our goal is to sustain wellness, factory-farmed meat products don't deliver the nutritional goods. The bad diets they are fed make for sick animals — and therefore people too.

We are blindly following tradition. We find it so difficult to overcome traditional ideas and ways of thinking. We rarely stop to question the fundamental ethics and underlying morality of slaughtering animals for food.

Our teeth and digestive systems are designed for eating meat. By nature, humans are meat eaters, and our bodies are designed for it. We have incisors for tearing meat, and molars for grinding it.

A carnivorous diet increases your risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Give up meat and you're more likely to live to a healthy old age.

There are many nutrients in meat that are critical to overall health. While there are many sources of protein, meat is a great source of complete protein, containing all the amino acids our bodies need. This includes the ones our body can't produce for itself.

If we stopped eating meat, the world's hungry would no longer be hungry. Vegetarians and vegans are not eating all the grains and soybeans: cattle are. A staggering 97 per cent of the world's soya crop is fed to livestock.

The worsening health conditions that are common now were not around when the cavemen were living off meat, vegetables, fish, nuts, seeds, and fruits.

Vitamin B12 is an essential part of our diet and doesn't come from non-animal sources: this nutrient keeps our bodies healthy and free from many illnesses.

Humans have canines, with big brains, opposing thumbs and the ability to make tools to hunt. Meat was one of the reasons humans were able to evolve such large, elaborate brains.

In the past few decades, meat has been blamed for all sorts of diseases. But we've been eating meat for a long time and blaming new health problems on old foods doesn't make much sense.

Many people own pets such as cats and dogs, providing them with love, care and security.

The 'Pygmy' people of central Africa are traditionally hunter-gatherers living in the rainforests throughout central Africa. They hunt and eat animals such as the wild boar, birds, and monkeys as well as fruits, berries, and nuts.

Despite the claims, there is no strong evidence that avoiding meat leads to health benefits. There are observational studies showing that vegetarians have a lower risk of several diseases. However, these results are largely explained by the fact that vegetarians are more health conscious overall and more likely to exercise, less likely to smoke, etc.

Humans have been killing animals for their food for millions of years.

Sheep are raised for their fleece, meat and milk. Wool has been used for clothing and other fabrics for over twelve thousand years.

The cow is considered the most sacred animal in the Hindu faith.

The leading causes of rainforest destruction are livestock and feed crops.

Fish is a low-fat and high-protein food that provides a range of health benefits.

Cheese is often not a vegetarian food because it contains rennet. Rennet is an enzyme extracted from stomachs of large ruminant animals like cows.

Much of the countryside of the world has been shaped by farming animals.

Dairy cows can often only produce very high milk yields for an average of 3 years. After this, they are slaughtered and the meat is normally used for beef.

Some experts claim we should eat less red meat to cut carbon emissions.