

EXPLORING SENTIENCE

LESSON & INQUIRY

Learning area: Science

Years: 4-7

Curriculum level: 3

Achievement Objectives

Students will:

- Use their growing science knowledge when considering issues of concern to them.
- Explore various aspects of an issue and make decisions about possible actions.

Key Competencies: Thinking, managing self.

Estimated time: Two 60-minute blocks

Lesson outline

Students will learn the meaning of sentience, and why sentience ought to be considered when making ethical decisions about the treatment of animals in practices like food production, entertainment and animal testing. Students will research and write a report based on a chosen topic.

Learning outcomes

Students are learning to

- Understand the meaning of sentience
- Identify the characteristics of a sentient being
- Identify ways in which scientific knowledge of animal sentience helps us understand the effects of our actions and inform personal and community decisions.

Reference link: A detailed summary of animal sentience:

www.voiceless.org.au/the-issues/animal-sentience

Corresponding worksheet: My Sentience Inquiry

Lesson

1. Explain to students the meaning of sentience. Sentience is the ability to perceive and feel things. Animals are sentient because they are capable of being aware of their surroundings, their relationships with other animals and humans, and of sensations in their body, including pain, hunger, heat and cold. Sentience is an important feature that distinguishes humans and animals from other living things such as plants.
2. Talk about how humans have determined that animals are sentient. Common sense and experience has convinced most people, especially those who live with companion animals, that animals have a level of awareness and are able to feel things like we do. Ask students to give examples of times they have observed animal sentience, whether at home, in the wild or on TV.
3. Discuss how scientific research reveals that animals have complex mental abilities, intelligence and

emotions. Researchers learn this by conducting controlled experiments and observing different species. Because of this, people are constantly learning about the complexity of animals' mental learning, communications, interactions and social lives. We also have a better understanding of the wide range of feelings and emotions animals experience, including empathy and depression. Show this video of how researchers determined that rats can show empathy to strangers: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofpZogD1_X0

4. Ask students to think of ways humans have changed their actions after better understanding animal sentience. Think about what stories have been in the media recently. For example, rodeo is in the news a lot lately because of animal cruelty causing fear and injuries. Many consumers are choosing to buy free range eggs, or avoid eggs, to ensure hens don't suffer in tiny cages. Many refuse to buy cosmetics that have been tested on animals. A growing number of people are choosing to become vegetarian or vegan to reduce the amount of suffering experienced by animals bred for food, especially those in intensive farming practices. Students should understand that the more we learn about animals, the more we want to protect them.

Inquiry: Ask students to research and report their findings using the planning template provided on one of the following topics:

- the use of whips in horse racing
- the use of animals in cosmetic animal testing
- the use of wild animals in circuses
- the use of hens in egg production
- the use of dolphins and orcas in marine parks
- the use of any animal for food
- or choose your own example of animals being used

Inquiry findings could be displayed as a poster, report, movie, PowerPoint presentation or another idea of their choosing.

Younger students may require support researching and answering the questions.

Please note you may wish to monitor student research to avoid accessing websites with potentially graphic and distressing images.

Evaluation

Use the following rubric to assess student reports:

- Demonstrates an understanding of sentience and provides examples of observable features that suggest sentience in their chosen animal.
- Conducts research to explain how scientific knowledge of natural animal behaviours can be used to inform personal decisions.
- Demonstrates an understanding that scientific knowledge of animal sentience helps people to understand the effect of their actions.

MY SENTIENCE INQUIRY

I am choosing the topic:

- The use of whips in horse racing
- The use of animals in cosmetic animal testing
- The use of wild animals in circuses
- The use of hens in egg production
- The use of dolphins and orcas in marine parks

Write down the reason why people use animals in this way. How does it affect animals?

List some natural behaviours you have researched:

What features tell us that these animals are sentient?

How can people change their actions to make sure animals no longer suffer this way?