

# Teach *for the* Animals

*The animals need you to teach in the public schools. Here's why:*

## ● All species raise their young

Humans are animals, too. Our young must also be raised; and how they are raised is a matter of primary importance to future generations. Agribusiness interests and other exploiters of animals know this and work hard to influence public education. Animal liberationists need to catch up and take an active role in the raising of our species' young. From pre-K through college, we need to be there to counterbalance speciesist depictions of animals and promote respectful interactions with our non-human kin.

## ◎ The world is changed by each generation

In every generation, the people in power try to make the next generation just like them, if not more so. Is it any wonder that people today eat more meat than ever before or that new ways to abuse animals (like genetic engineering) constantly arise? Today's children really are tomorrow's future. If we don't want the pattern of escalating animal exploitation to continue, we must be where the children are in order to challenge the selfish amorality of the dominant culture and model a more compassionate and ethical way of being in the world and being with other creatures.

## ● We must counter the lies before they solidify

Teachers tell lies about animals at every grade level. The cumulative effect of these lies, in the context of a culture characterized by the exploitation of animals, is to create a closed system of beliefs and behaviors that becomes more stable with every passing year. When people are still young, they are more open to new ideas and new ways of being. People are most open to new ideas when they are in school, since that is a setting where one expects to encounter new information and ideas. Animal advocates need to be in the schools, to challenge the lies told by other teachers and to tell the truth about people and other animals.

## ◎ People need to know how to think

The public school system was designed to produce docile workers and uncomplaining citizens. Young people aren't given the skills to see through — or even see — the barrage of propaganda they confront every day. Seduced by Nike, McDonalds, and the war machine, young people are turned into meat-eating, flag-waving consumer drones who believe everything CNN tells them. A person who can't evaluate new information can't be reached by even the best arguments for veganism or against vivisection. A person who can't read can't read "Why Vegan?" Animal advocates need to help young people learn how to use their minds.

## ● Democracy requires an educated populace

Many animal advocacy organizations seek to protect or liberate animals through democratic action. But successful democracy requires an educated populace and we don't have that. Our efforts to create change by democratic means are destined to fail as long as our fellow citizens are not competent to fully exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities. Not having the skill to seek out and process relevant information, they will continue to support "farm aid" that benefits corporate meat packers and school lunch programs that line the pockets of dairy producers rather than the bellies of hungry children. If we want them to join us at the ballot box, we have to make sure that upcoming young voters have the tools and information they need to assess and reject the competing claims of corporate agribusiness.

## ◎ Prevention is the best medicine

Children start out feeling kinship with animals and end up believing themselves to be superior. This is due to socialization into speciesism, much of which occurs in the course of formal education. By intervening in the process as it is happening, we can make more of a difference than if we wait until the smug superiority of speciesism has become a stable part of the personality.

## ● The public schools can be saved

Even though our schools now fall far short of that goal, the idea of a free, quality education for all is entirely excellent. We can and must improve the schools for the sake of both human and non-human animals. While student and taxpayer action can help, the best way for us to do this is from within, as teachers and administrators.

## ◎ Alternative schools are not the answer

Some schools do teach students to respect the environment and their fellow beings. However, these schools tend to be populated by the children of parents who are already teaching them such values. If we want to reach the students who will not otherwise hear our message, we have to go into the public schools, even though that is much more difficult and less well paid than working for private alternative schools.

## ● Public school students are a captive audience

All people under the age of sixteen are required to attend school. Most of them do so in the public school system. While the ethics of compulsory education can be debated, the reality is that in any given school, under one roof, are hundreds or thousands of young people whose waking hours are often spent hoping for anything to relieve the tedium of indoctrination into the dominant culture. Instead of waiting for them to grow up and hoping they'll listen to us for just a minute, we need to consider going to the source, where there are millions of people both willing and happy to listen to alternative sources of information. If we offer such information as honest and caring people who see them every day, we will be trusted much more than a one-time speaker and will have the opportunity to make a more lasting impression.

## ◎ Students need evidence of another way

While there always will be the exceptional students who trust themselves and don't need role models to show them the way, most elementary and secondary school students need models of a different way of being in the world and being with non-human animals. Because we care about them — they're animals too! — we can give students the kindness and respect they do not receive from other adults in their lives. They learn how it feels to be respected at the same time as they observe the respect we offer animals, making it more likely that they will be generous with their own respect.



## Even if you don't become a teacher...

...you still can and should influence public education. Do the public schools in your area offer vegetarian options in the lunch room? Are students receiving free lunches forced to drink milk or is soy milk available? Do the elementary schools use chick hatching (bad) or bird watching (good) projects to teach children about birds? Do the secondary schools use vivisection (bad) or computer models (good) in biology classes? Do students in health classes receive industry propaganda instead of unbiased information about meat and dairy? Are animal advocates invited in to balance any guest speakers or "educational materials" provided by industries that exploit animals? Is there a 4-H or Future Farmers club and what do the members do? What kinds of experiments are students encouraged to do for science fairs? These are just some of the issues in which you might choose to intervene as a voter, tax payer, or concerned citizen. If your local school board is elected rather than appointed, you're in luck. Even if most of the power is concentrated at the state level, it's still relatively easy for a small group of committed citizens to make a difference.

*This message was brought to you by:*  
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