Teacher Guide: An Introduction to Veganism

Transition Year | Vegan Society of Ireland (VSI)

Duration: 50–60 minutes
Format: Introduction, three videos and class discussion

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, students should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of veganism.
- Distinguish between a plant-based diet and veganism as a philosophy.
- Identify some environmental and ethical arguments associated with veganism.
- Evaluate arguments and consider the evidence supporting them.
- Express and discuss their own views respectfully.

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

Explain to students:

“Today, we’ll explore veganism, look at why people choose to go vegan, and discuss some of the arguments behind it. The purpose of this class isn’t to tell you what to believe or what you should eat. It’s to introduce you to the vegan point of view and give you an opportunity to think critically about it.

“You’re encouraged to question the arguments, share your views respectfully and form your own opinions.”

Ask students:

- What do you think veganism means?
- Why do you think people choose to go vegan?

After hearing some responses, introduce the definition:

“Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.”

Explain that people may choose a plant-based diet for environmental or health reasons, while veganism is a philosophy concerned with avoiding animal exploitation and cruelty.

2. Video One: Environmental Impact (10 minutes video + 3 minutes discussion)

Introduce the video:

"This video was published in 2021, so it isn't brand-new. Its broad findings can be compared with research collated by Our World in Data, including studies comparing the environmental impacts of different foods. As you watch, consider both its arguments and what questions you might still have."

Video: *Is Meat Really That Bad? - Kurzgesagt*

After the video, ask:

- What did you think? Did anything surprise you?
- Was there anything you questioned or wanted to know more about?

3. Video Two: Introducing the Ethical Perspective (1.5 minutes)

Play a short video produced by the Vegan Society of Ireland.

Video: Key Reason for Adopting a Plant-Based Diet: It's for the Animals

4. Video Three: Reasons to Go Vegan (10 minutes video + 3 minutes discussion)

Introduce the video:

"This video explores reasons why people choose to go vegan, particularly their views on how animals are treated and used for food. As you watch, consider which arguments you find convincing and which you would like to question."

Video: *10 minute version of 101 Reasons to Go Vegan - James Wildman*

After the video, ask:

- What stood out to you? Which arguments did you find most convincing, and why?
- Were there any claims you would like to investigate further?

5. Class Discussion (15–17 minutes)

Teacher guidance: Use the below questions as prompts rather than a checklist. Allow the discussion to develop naturally, encourage students to explain their reasoning, and ensure different viewpoints are treated respectfully. There is no expectation that everyone reaches the same conclusion.

Invite students to discuss the following questions:

1. Has your understanding of veganism changed as a result of this lesson?
2. What responsibilities, if any, do humans have towards animals?
3. Which arguments from the videos did you find most convincing, and why?
4. Was there anything you disagreed with or would like to investigate further?
5. Can you understand a point of view without agreeing with it?

6. Exploring Common Questions and Objections (3-5 minutes)

Teacher guidance: Having given students an opportunity to share their own thoughts, questions and objections, introduce the supplementary resource, *Common Questions and Objections: Exploring the Vegan Perspective*.

Display selected questions and responses on the screen and briefly explore how someone with a vegan perspective might respond.

Encourage students to consider whether these responses address the objections raised and whether they agree or disagree with the reasoning.

There is no need to cover every question. Select those most relevant to the discussion and the interests of the class.

7. Closing Reflection (1 minute)

Remind students that the aim is to understand the vegan perspective, explore its ethical arguments and think critically about the issues raised—not to require everyone to reach the same conclusion.

8. Complete survey (1 minute)

We would be very grateful if you, the teacher, would complete this short survey. It will help the charity a lot with our KPIs.

Survey: VSI Survey

Thank you!