

# Teachers' Guide

**CHALLENGING** TeachKind

**ASSUMPTIONS**

## Part 1 Exploring Speciesism and Discrimination

Please see Parts 2 and 3 at [TeachKind.org/SocialJustice](https://TeachKind.org/SocialJustice).

### OVERVIEW

The following lessons are designed to help students move beyond the assumptions that they might make about other sentient beings and become more perceptive, thoughtful, and analytical about the reasons humans engage in certain behavior. They can serve as a preliminary step in helping students determine what actions are in line with their belief system and how society can challenge speciesism—the belief that all other animal species are inferior to our own.

Students begin by thinking critically about and discussing the abstract concepts of social justice with a gallery walk activity. Next, they'll reflect on their own thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes along with any inconsistencies in their behavior with a lesson on cognitive dissonance. Then, they'll turn their attention to a video that explores the moral considerations regarding animals and introduces the concept of equal consideration of interests. The unit will culminate with students' viewing and analyzing the "Challenging Assumptions" video, which will help them practice identifying and challenging the assumptions they've made about the rights of other animals. By the end of this unit, students will better understand their identities, values, and perspectives and will be better able to recognize and respect those of others, regardless of their species.



### WARM-UP ACTIVITY

Begin by instructing students to shake both hands in the air over their heads and then clasp their hands together, interlacing their fingers. Next, ask them to unclasp their hands and shake them out over their heads again. Then, have them clasp their hands together once more, this time interlacing their fingers with the opposite thumb on top. Ask students to describe how it felt to clasp their hands with the opposite thumb on top. Point out that doing so may feel uncomfortable or even be a bit challenging to do without some extra thought—much as it might feel to challenge assumptions that they've held for most of their lives. Inform students that in this unit, as they explore topics of social injustice, privilege, and bigotry, among others, they may feel uncomfortable or have trouble understanding new concepts at times. Assure them that your classroom—either in person or virtual—is a safe space where they can share their thoughts and feelings openly, and encourage them to ask questions and listen carefully to their peers as they participate in a variety of discussions.

Now that some expectations have been established, have students write down their responses to the following prompts to assess their prior knowledge and prepare them for the unit:

- Describe a period in history, which may be the present, when a certain group of individuals are or were harmed in some way as a result of prejudice against them. (Define prejudice as "an unfavorable opinion or feeling about a group of individuals formed without knowledge or reason.")
- Explain the types of justification used to continue treating the group of individuals unfairly (e.g., tradition, beliefs about superiority, or perceived necessity).

Invite students to share their responses with the class. Encourage them to ask each other questions and listen attentively as their peers express their thoughts. Allow for a variety of viewpoints to be shared while ensuring that the conversation remains respectful. Explain to students that throughout this unit, they'll be asked to challenge assumptions made about both humans and other animals and to reflect on what it means to oppose all prejudice in their day-to-day lives.



*Teaching virtually? You can use these lessons for distance learning using popular online conferencing tools like Zoom or Skype, both of which include chat features that allow students to type their responses to discussion questions and respond to one another in real time. If video conferencing tools aren't available to you, you can have students participate in discussions in an online forum, such as Google Classroom.*

## INTRODUCTION

Part 1 of "Challenging Assumptions" will provide students with an overarching theme of social justice to guide their learning throughout the year as well as basic knowledge of the concepts explained in the "Challenging Assumptions" video, which is designed to be shown at the end of this unit. Parts 2 and 3 of "Challenging Assumptions" are available at [TeachKind.org/SocialJustice](https://TeachKind.org/SocialJustice).

## WHY CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS?

As educators, we aim to foster the development of critical thinking and processing skills in students, which will allow them to examine and understand important societal issues even after they leave the classroom. To achieve this, it is essential to incorporate strategies that cultivate students' higher-level analytical and communication skills.

Identifying societal assumptions and values that negatively impact others—such as that humans are superior to all other animals or that some animals are to be cared for while others are to be used for personal gain—is the first step in empowering students to be consistent in their beliefs. This will help them ensure that their behavior and actions are justified, leading to improved social interactions with peers as well as greater kindness toward animals.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How do contradictory beliefs and actions play a part in society's treatment of animals?
2. What would it mean to give equal consideration to the interests of all sentient beings?