



# Animal Portrayals and Stereotypes

## UNIT OVERVIEW

Animals play a big role in society, whether we as individuals have regular contact with them or not. From a very young age we are exposed to many different messages about animals. We begin to shape our understandings and develop the ideas we have about many animal species through different sources of oral, written and visual language. The messages we receive are not always accurate and as a result there are many stereotypes and misconceptions that people may have about different animal species.

Animals are sentient beings, just like humans, and all species have their own unique behaviours and needs. If we do not understand the stereotypes and misconceptions associated with different animals, we may miss the chance to understand their true nature. As a consequence, if we don't really understand different animals we risk not providing them the highest welfare possible. Furthermore, studies suggest that the acceptance of animal stereotypes, especially regarding unpopular animals, can inhibit people's desire to see these animals protected. In fact, children are less likely to care about the protection of animals that they dislike (Almeida, Vasconcelos, Strecht-Ribeiro, 2014). This means that native species who are threatened with extinction, or are particularly vulnerable to being harmed due to their presence in human environments, may not be considered important enough to save because of people's attitudes toward them.

This unit explores the way animals are portrayed in several sources of oral, visual and written language that students will commonly be exposed to in life. While there are many contrasting messages about animals in the various source types discussed and we do not want to generalise, this unit highlights just some examples of the inaccurate or negative stereotypes and misconceptions they contain. Through exploring these examples this unit aims to give students the curiosity and skills to begin to look for other animal related messages they see in visual, oral and written language with a more critical lens to recognise where there are inaccuracies.

## UNIT TIMEFRAME

The overall timing of this unit will depend on whether teachers choose to integrate some of the activities of this unit into their existing literacy programme or not. It is up to teachers to determine the prior knowledge and abilities of their students to determine if they will be able to complete some of the activities independently. Furthermore, some of the activities will span more than one session and the number of sessions needed will depend on the pace at which students work to complete independent projects and the length of time spent watching the films in each session.

## ANIMAL WELFARE ACHIEVEMENT OBJECTIVES

- Gain knowledge and develop understandings of animal sentience.
- Identify ways society portrays different animal species.
- Describe how stereotypes can affect people's attitudes and behaviour toward animals.
- Evaluate how these stereotypes can affect people's knowledge of animals as sentient beings with specific needs.
- Explain how stereotypes can affect the welfare of animals.
- Gain knowledge and develop understandings of animal sentience.
- Identify ways society portrays different animal species.
- Describe how stereotypes can affect people's attitudes and behaviour toward animals.
- Evaluate how these stereotypes can affect people's knowledge of animals as sentient beings with specific needs.
- Explain how stereotypes can affect the welfare of animals.



### Learning Areas

It is intended that teachers choose from the selection of Australian Curriculum levels, learning areas and achievement standards, that they will focus and place more emphasis on – based on their students’ prior knowledge, needs and learning goals.

### General Capabilities (levels 2 - 4)

It is recommended that you chose 1 or 2 General Capabilities to focus on as you teach the unit. A learning opportunity for each element has been included as a starting point.

	Element	Learning Opportunity
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING	<b>Inquiring – identifying, exploring and organising information and ideas</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pose questions</li> <li>• Identify and clarify information and ideas</li> <li>• Organise and process information</li> </ul>	As students look at the various media prompts encourage them to ask questions to clarify and to probe for the reason the animals have been in presented in this way, as well as discuss the possible consequences of the depictions.
	<b>Analysing, synthesising and evaluating reasoning and procedures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply logic and reasoning</li> </ul>	Students could be encouraged to use their logic and reasoning to assess whether there is sufficient evidence to support a claim.
ETHICAL UNDERSTANDING	<b>Understanding ethical concepts and issues</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise ethical concepts</li> <li>• Explore ethical concepts in context</li> </ul>	Throughout the unit students’ can be encouraged to discuss the ethical issues around the representation of animals in different media.

## ENGLISH

EN

## YEAR 4

## Language for Interaction

- [ACELA1496] Understand differences between the language of opinion and feeling and the language of factual reporting or recording

## Text Structure and Organisation

- [ACELA1490] Understand how texts vary in complexity and technicality depending on the approach to the topic, the purpose and the intended audience

## Expressing and Developing Ideas

- [ACELA1496] Explore the effect of choices when framing an image, placement of elements in the image, and salience on composition of still and moving images in a range of types of texts

## Creating Texts

- [ACELY1694] Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features
- [ACELY1695] Re-read and edit for meaning by adding, deleting or moving words or word groups to improve content and structure

## YEAR 5

## Text Structure and Organisation

- [ACELA1505] Understand that the starting point of a sentence gives prominence to the message in the text and allows for prediction of how the text will unfold

## Examining Literature

- [ACELT1611] Understand, interpret and experiment with sound devices and imagery, including simile, metaphor and personification, in narratives, shape poetry, songs, anthems and odes

## Creating Texts

- [ACELY1704] Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive print and multimodal texts, choosing text structures, language features, images and sound appropriate to purpose and audience
- [ACELY1705] Re-read and edit student's own and others' work using agreed criteria for text structures and language features

## YEAR 6

## Language for Interaction

- [ACELA1517] Understand the uses of objective and subjective language and bias

## Text Structure and Organisation

- [ACELA1518] Understand how authors often innovate on text structures and play with language features to achieve particular aesthetic, humorous and persuasive purposes and effects

## Expressing and Developing Ideas

- [ACELA1525] Investigate how vocabulary choices, including evaluative language can express shades of meaning, feeling and opinion

## Creating Texts

- [ACELY1714] Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, choosing and experimenting with text structures, language features, images and digital resources appropriate to purpose and audience
- [ACELY1715] Re-read and edit students' own and others' work using agreed criteria and explaining editing choices

## YEAR 7

## Language for Interaction

- [ACELA1529] Understand how accents, styles of speech and idioms express and create personal and social identities
- [ACELA1782] Understand how language is used to evaluate texts and how evaluations about a text can be substantiated by reference to the text and other sources

## Creating Texts

- [ACELY1725] Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts, selecting aspects of subject matter and particular language, visual, and audio features to convey information and ideas
- [ACELY1726] Edit for meaning by removing repetition, refining ideas, reordering sentences and adding or substituting words for impact

## YEAR 8

### Interpreting, analysing, evaluating

- [ACELY1732] Analyse and evaluate the ways that text structures and language features vary according to the purpose of the text and the ways that referenced sources add authority to a text

## Creating Texts

- [ACELY1736] Create imaginative, informative and persuasive texts that raise issues, report events and advance opinions, using deliberate language and textual choices, and including digital elements as appropriate
- [ACELY1810] Experiment with text structures and language features to refine and clarify ideas to improve the effectiveness of students' own texts

general impressions that they are aware of relating to animals. For example, some people would stereotype pigs as being dirty and smelly.

In the middle of separate sheets of A3 paper write down the names of the following animals: pig, sheep, chicken, cow, bird, cat, dog, rat, mouse. Place these around the classroom and have students rotate around each piece of paper in small groups, recording any stereotypes, common messages or general impressions they know about each animal. Provide one extra blank piece of A3 paper for students to record any others they can think of related to animals that are not already covered.

After students have completed this, collect all the sheets back in and select some of the ideas to discuss as a class. Ask students to reflect on whether there is any truth in these stereotypes, messages and impressions? Where might these ideas have come from? Where have they heard these ideas or seen them reinforced?

This is also a good opportunity to discuss how there are different perceptions of particular animals in different cultures. For example, cows are seen as scared by Hindus, but some other groups may perceive them largely as a food source. You may notice there are some contrasting stereotypes, messages and impressions recorded on the sheets based on these cultural differences which could provide an excellent starting point for this discussion.

Explain to students that over the course of the unit they will be critically examining various portrayals of animals and learning how the power of language – oral, visual and written – can affect our perceptions of animals. They will be investigating portrayals of animals in commonly used phrases, images, films and books. After critically analysing these sources, they will be learning the true facts about these animals and creating their own piece of visual, oral or written language that aims to dispel some of these stereotypes, misconceptions and impressions of animals.

*Note: The following four learning experiences each cover a different source of oral, written or visual language where animals are represented. They are each broken down into a sequence of activities related to that source. The four main learning experiences can be carried out in any order; however, it is recommended that books/written texts are covered last as these activities require students to independently draw on the skills they have covered when looking at figurative language, images and films.*

## LEARNING EXPERIENCES



### 1. Animal Stereotypes and Misconceptions

#### *Learning Intentions*

We are learning to. . .

- Identify ways society portrays different animal species.

Introduce the upcoming unit to students by explaining that as humans we interact with animals in many different ways, directly and indirectly, and that animals are portrayed in many different ways in the world around us.

To begin with, ask students to try and think of any stereotypes, common messages or

## 2. Figurative Language

### *Learning Intentions*

We are learning to. . .

- Identify and interpret examples of figurative language related to animals.
- Describe how stereotypes in figurative language can affect people's attitudes and behaviour towards animals.
- Create our own figurative phrases to convey a message.

Students will have varying prior knowledge of the term figurative language and the different types of literary devices that are covered by the term figurative language. You may need to spend some time developing your students' understanding of this concept prior to carrying out the following activities.

#### Activity One:

One common type of figurative language are idioms. There are hundreds of idioms that involve animals. Some of these animal related idioms reinforce stereotypes against specific animals and others serve to imply a message that animals do not need to be treated with compassion and respect.

*Some examples of animal related idioms are:*

- No room to swing a cat.
- Pig-headed
- Pick of the litter.
- All bark and no bite.
- Back the wrong horse.
- A cash cow.
- Cat with nine lives.
- Rat on someone/rat someone out.
- Smell a rat.

Share a couple of examples with the students and discuss their meanings. Then give students the opportunity to research animal related idioms. Have them record a selection of idioms they can find and what they mean. This could be done as an independent literacy activity. In addition to individually recording

the idioms they find, you may want to have a large piece of paper available for the whole class to each record a couple of their ideas on. (Ensure that they check they aren't duplicating ones that have already been recorded) Collate ideas for the following discussion as they go.

After students have found some independently, these can be shared back with the class. Ask students to reflect on how these idioms can be seen to be negative in terms of the messages they send about animals. These can be discussed generally and in terms of specific idioms. One example could be a cash cow, which implies that cows are for humans to make money from.

#### Activity Two:

PETA has offered alternatives to some common animal related idioms. For example, instead of bring home the bacon, bring home the bagels could be used; instead of put all your eggs in one basket, put all your berries in one bowl could be used instead.

Challenge your students to think creatively and come up with some of their own idiom alternatives. They will still need to stay true to the meaning of the original idiom and should use some of the same language instead of completely reinventing the phrase i.e. bring home the is shared by both the original and the alternative, put all your \_\_\_\_\_ in one \_\_\_\_\_ is shared by the original and the alternative.

*Students can come up with alternatives for the following:*

- Kill two birds with one stone.
- Let the cat out of the bag.
- Take the bull by the horns.
- Be the guinea pig.
- Hold your horses.
- Beat a dead horse.
- More than one way to skin a cat.

Prior to writing their alternatives have a class discussion on the meaning of each of these idioms so that all students are clear of the meaning their alternatives need to convey. You may also want to get students to write alternatives for some of the other idioms they found in Activity One. This could be completed as an independent literacy activity.

Once students have written their own animal-friendly idioms they can choose their favourite and publish it with an illustration to create a class bank of alternative idioms. You can also share the alternatives that PETA offered with the students once they have had a go at creating their own. These can be found on the Alternative Animal Idioms sheet.

### Activity Three:

Another way that language is used in a figurative sense is through ways that people metaphorically describe human behaviours using animals and perceived animal traits. Another term for this is zoomorphism – where animal characteristics are assigned to humans. For example, people may say someone is a pig if they are untidy or people may say someone is a chicken if they are too afraid to do something.

There are many metaphors and similes that involve animals to describe people. In small groups get students to brainstorm all of the different animal related metaphors and similes they can think of. When they record them, get students to classify whether they think they are drawing on an animal to describe a negative trait or a positive trait about a person.

*Ask students to reflect on and discuss the following in their groups:*

- How many of them are used to describe negative traits versus the number that are used to describe positive traits?
- Are the metaphors or similes that were used to describe negative traits in people fair to the animals? Are they accurate?
- If they are accurate in terms of the behaviour, is it fair to give them a negative association? For example, saying someone is a sheep is used to imply that they just follow everyone else and don't think for themselves. Sheep do tend to stick together and follow one another; however, sheep are preyed upon animals and sticking with the flock is a natural behaviour for them to help them feel protected from danger. They do not do this because they are not intelligent enough to think for themselves; it is a defensive behavior that they use for a better chance of survival.
- How might the use of these metaphors associated with negative traits in people influence people's perceptions of animals?

Students may not be aware of the reasons behind the animal behaviours being drawn

on in these metaphors, i.e. they may not understand why sheep stick together as a group, so after this discussion, give students a chance to carry out some research about the animal behaviours associated with negative traits in people.

After students have researched some of these animal behaviours they can create a 'did you know?' poster about a metaphor. One way this could be presented is by stating the metaphor at the top and then underneath writing 'Did you know...' followed by a statement about whatever behaviour is being associated with that animal. Their 'did you know...' statement can either correct the inaccuracy of that behaviour or explain it further to reduce the negative connotation. For example: "She is a sheep, that's why she always buys the latest phone." Did you know that sheep do follow the others in their flock, but it is not because they don't think for themselves? Sheep are preyed upon animals and sticking with their flock is a natural behaviour to help them feel safe from any potential dangers.

Encourage students to choose a range of different metaphors or similes to publish so that they can be displayed and others can learn about a range of animal behaviours.

## 3. Images

### *Learning Intentions*

We are learning to . . .

- Interpret the messages that images, as a source of visual language, can convey about animals.
- Describe how stereotypes in images can affect people's attitudes and behaviour towards animals.
- Understand how and why particular types of images are used to suit the audience and purpose of the text.

Science recognises animals as sentient beings. Sentient beings are those that can feel (both physically and emotionally) and are aware of and responsive to their surroundings. Despite the scientific knowledge that animals are sentient, there are people who do not have the same attitude towards **all** animals.

In Australia, there are many strong, negative perceptions of animals that humans consider to be pests, such as possums, cats, camels, foxes, rabbits, goats and rats. For example, despite companion dogs and foxes both being sentient beings, with the capability to think and feel, some attitudes towards them and their treatment are significantly different. Conservation efforts in New Zealand have a strong focus on the eradication of certain species of animals that are considered to be pests because of the impact they have on native New Zealand wildlife with the Predator Free 2050 project.

*Note: RSPCA Australia recognises that in certain circumstances it is necessary to control populations of these animals in order to reduce or remove their adverse impact, provided any measures are properly justified, effective and humane.*

*Any measures taken to reduce or eradicate a specific population of 'pest' animals must recognise that these animals require the same level of consideration for their welfare as that given to domestic and native animals.*

### Activity One

Download the [Animal Images sheet](#) and display them on the board for students to see. In small groups ask the students to write down three headings – like, dislike and impartial – and get them to discuss and categorise the animals under each of these headings. Ask them to consider why they have classified the animals in the way that they have. Ensure students understand there are no right or wrong answers, it is just their opinions.

After they have completed this in small groups, discuss some of their responses as a whole class, focusing on the reasons for their classifications. Collect their responses, these will be referred back to at a later stage.

### Activity Two

Go to the following sources and display the images for students to see:

[Australia Zoo – Common Brushtail Possum](#)

[British Wildlife Centre - Weasels](#)

[Smithsonian's National Zoo & Conservation Biology Unit - Norway Rats](#)

[Backyard Buddies - Brushtail Possum](#)

[DOC - Why predator free 2050?](#)

[DOC - Pests and Threats - Rats](#)

[WWF – Introduced Predators to Australia](#)

[Predator Free NZ – Introduced Predator Facts - Weasels](#)

*Note: Some of these images are more graphic than others, teachers may choose to omit using some of these sources if they don't feel that they are appropriate for students.*

Get students to note down any words that come to mind about these 'pest' species as they view each of the images. The sources have been listed with the more positive images at the top and the more negative images at the bottom. When showing these to students mix them up. They may associate different words with different images that show the same species; get them to number each image so that they can keep track of which responses relate to which images. Students can share some of their responses at the end.

After viewing the images, split the class into pairs or small groups and distribute copies/ provide web links of each of the images and the corresponding text. For the school journal articles the whole article can be provided. Depending on how many pairs or small groups you have, some groups will receive the same text as another. Get the students to read through the text that accompanies the image and answer the questions on the [Images of 'Pest' Species sheet](#). Students will report back to the class about the text they had and their responses to the questions.

Hopefully students will recognise that the purpose of the first four texts is to inform readers about these animal species and positively interacting with them. Following this the images are likely to have been included to show people what the species look like or to illustrate an element of the article. The images have relatively positive connotations and influence people to feel positively about the animals. The purpose of the last four texts is to inform readers about the negative consequences that these animals can have on the environment and wildlife around them and/or to persuade the reader that action needs to be taken to control the populations of these species. The images have negative connotations and influence people to feel negatively about the animals.

Once students have heard back from the others about all of the texts, ask them if they notice any commonalities about what groups have fed back on. Generally, what conclusions could they draw about how the images may be being used to influence people's ideas

about 'pest' species? Images are just one way people can try to influence the opinions of others.

One discussion you may wish to have further with the students is the depiction of the possum in the [Backyard Buddies - Brushtail Possum article](#), from Australia, compared to the other articles about possums as pests from New Zealand. This article acknowledges the negative impacts that possums may have on the environment they live in, but is suggesting ways that people can respond to these for the benefit of the people and the possums who share the environment. Ask students to think about the approach the different articles take to discussing the negative impacts possums may have in their environment and as a result why they think the [Backyard Buddies - Brushtail Possum article](#) may not include images of possums doing things, such as nesting in people's roofs?

### Activity Three

Explain to students that despite their environmental impacts, these animals that are considered pests are still animals, just like the animals we have at home like cats and dogs, and that they have now seen how purposefully chosen images have the potential to influence people's perception of them.

There are more to these animals than what we see in the images. [Download the 'Pest' Species Quiz](#) activity for students to complete. The purpose of this is to share some interesting information about these animals with students so that they can see these animals in a different light to how they have in some of the images and articles.

After completing the quiz and going through the answers, get students back into their groups that they worked in for Activity One and pass out their responses. Ask them to reflect on how they initially categorised possums, weasels and rats and their reasoning for doing so. Do they think they have been influenced by how these animals are portrayed in images in Australia? Did seeing some of the more positive representations of these animals, knowing that images can be purposefully chosen based on purpose and audience and finding out some additional information, change their opinions in any way? Why or why not? There are no right or wrong answers to this, the purpose of this discussion is to get students to consider what influences their opinions.

## 4. Films

### Learning Intentions

We are learning to . . .

- Interpret the messages that films, as sources of visual and oral language, can convey about animals.
- Describe how stereotypes in films can affect people's attitude and behaviour towards animals.
- Identify connections between films about how animals are portrayed.
- Explain how stereotypes can be used in the characterisation of animal characters in films.
- Critically examine the stereotypes used in some animal characterisations and compare these with reality.

*Note: For all the films and film clips used in the following activities we strongly recommend that teachers view these prior to viewing with students. These films are all aimed at youth audiences, however, some have PG, rather than G, classifications and teachers need to determine their suitability for the students in their class. Teachers may also wish to view parents' guides online to determine their suitability. The films are being viewed for the purpose of discussing particular messaging around animals in films; teachers may wish to acknowledge or address other areas of concern that arise in the films but this is up to their discretion.*

### Activity One

Within species, different breeds can be subject to their own stereotypes and misconceptions. Dogs are an example of this; often breeds such as Pit Bulls, Rottweilers, Bull Terriers and Dobermans are perceived to be aggressive breeds and breeds such as Labradors and Golden Retrievers are perceived to be much friendlier. Students will watch a series of clips from various films which have dogs in them portrayed in different ways.

Prior to viewing, give students the [Dog Breeds sheet](#) and ask them to write down any key words that they associate with each dog breed to capture their prior knowledge (so that students have plenty of space to write, it may be beneficial to print this on A3 paper,

rather than A4). The words they note down could also include words that they know are commonly associated with that dog breed, even if they don't necessarily agree with that opinion themselves. If they do not know anything about the breeds depicted, they can leave them blank. If you notice that many students are unaware of the stereotypes associated with many of the dogs it may be necessary to carry out some brief research on dog breed stereotypes. Do this after the film clips are viewed for the first time and prior to when they are watched for the second time, so that they have the necessary context for the discussion.

[Download the Dog Breeds Film Clips and Notes sheet](#) and watch each of the clips with students. Save the discussion points listed for later in the activity; at this point just get students to watch the clips.

After watching, ask students to go back and fill in any new key words on their Dog Breeds sheet, with a different colour, that they would associate with each dog breed. If they had no prior knowledge of the dog breed before watching the clip, ask them to fill in key words that would begin to shape their impression of this breed if this was the first time they were aware of it. Note: Not all of the dog breeds shown in the clips are included on the sheet for discussion.

After students have filled in the sheet, ask students to share some of the key words they noted for each of the breeds. How did what they see in the clips affect, match or alter their perceptions of the different dog breeds?

In a second session, re-watch each of the clips with the students, this time taking time to discuss and unpack the messages seen in each of the films. The Dog Breeds Film Clips and Notes includes some discussion points intended to be used as a starting point for class discussions about these clips. They are designed to get students to make sense of the messages they are seeing in the clips, think critically about the clips, make connections between the clips and begin to unpack the different stereotypes associated with the different dog breeds.

As part of the discussion points Following Up, students can reflect on whether the dog breed or the way the dog has been trained is more likely to lead to aggressive behaviour. Share the following study from the University of Bristol with your students - [How common is aggression in UK dogs?](#) This study found that

while breed is a risk factor, there are many more factors which explain the difference between aggressive and non-aggressive dogs. The article concludes with the sentence 'This suggests that it is not appropriate to evaluate the risk of aggressive behaviour in an individual dog using characteristics such as breed type.'

Therefore, to conclude this activity, ask students to reflect on the question – Why do you think is it important to be more aware of dog characters in films and the breeds chosen for these characters going forward? It is important because we need to be aware that responsible animal guardianship (ownership) is a crucial factor in dog aggression and we can't just allow ourselves to generalise based on the way breeds are commonly portrayed.

### Activity Two

Many films have storylines centered around there being protagonists (the 'good' characters or heroes) and antagonists (the 'bad' characters or villains). Sometimes when predator animals are cast as the antagonists, the villainous nature of their character is built around their natural eating habits – they are made out to be scary, evil or problematic because they prey on other animals.

To begin discussion around this, watch Madagascar and/or Shark Tale. [Download the Madagascar Notes sheet](#) and [the Shark Tale Notes sheet](#) for students to fill out as they watch the films. These notes sheets are designed to help ensure that students are actively engaged while watching the films.

[Download the Predator and Prey Film Notes sheet](#) for plot summaries of these films and discussion points. A number of discussion points are included, and these are designed to provide teachers with a starting point for how to approach a critical discussion of these films and the portrayal of predators in each. One way you can facilitate the discussion of these films is using a technique such as an inner and an outer circle with pairs of students talking and then one rotating for each different point so that all students are actively taking part in the discussion.

In small groups, ask students to brainstorm a list of other films they have seen with animals as characters. Then have them write down the species of the animals in the film and classify them based on whether they were representing a hero/'good guy' or a villain/'bad guy'. Some movies will only have animals relevant to one category which is fine.

Once students have got a selection of films on their sheet, ask them if they notice any trends. Refer to the Predator and Prey Film Notes sheet for final discussion points to link the brainstorm with the films viewed.

## 5. Books/Written Texts

### *Learning Intentions*

We are learning to. . .

- Use our critical analysis skills to identify explicit and inferred messages about animals in written texts.
- Interpret the messages that written language can convey about animals and how these can shape our perceptions of animals.
- Create our own written texts that convey correct messaging about animals and also suit the audience and purpose of the text.

### Activity One

This activity is a chance for students to independently practise critically analysing the messages they can find about animals in written texts, now that the class has worked together to critically analyse the messages that can be found about animals in visual and oral texts.

Young children can learn a lot about the world through reading picture books. There are a vast number of picture books about animals, which range from realistic portrayals of animals and their interactions with humans through to highly anthropomorphic, imaginative stories about animals. Through reading about animals in picture books children build up a collection of ideas and messages about different animals. While many of these ideas and messages are correct, some are not. For example, cats are often represented drinking milk and people grow up believing that cats drink milk (beyond the milk they drink from their mothers as kittens). Cats are in fact lactose intolerant and should only drink water once weaned from their mothers. Another example is the way dogs are often shown playing fetch with sticks. It is recommended that other toys are chosen to throw for dogs because the sharp ends and splinters on sticks can cause serious injuries.

Students will choose an animal that they would like to investigate. Then using the library, school literacy resources, and/or books that they have at home they will find a selection of texts (books, big books, poems, songs, etc.) related to that animal. Reading through the texts, students will identify any messages or ideas, either explicit or inferred, that would contribute to a child's overall understanding of that animal through reading that text. At this stage, students should record all messages and ideas that can be gleaned from the text, whether correct or incorrect. [Download the Animals in Texts for Children sheet](#) for students to fill out (so that students have plenty of space to write it may be beneficial to print this on A3 paper, rather than A4). Once students have collected their information, they will go through each message or idea and determine its accuracy. This may require some further research depending on their familiarity with the animal they have chosen. Any messages or ideas that were inaccurate or require further information, students can find out and write what would be correct instead. This could be completed as an independent literacy activity.

Before students select their texts, discuss the term 'anthropomorphic' with them. Show them some examples of texts where animals are living in completely anthropomorphic worlds and there is very little realism to them – for example, where animals of all different species who normally don't inhabit the same areas are all living in a human world engaging in human activities. Encourage students to choose texts with more realism than this. However, texts with some anthropomorphic qualities will still be useful for the purposes of this activity, such as those where a companion animal (pet) is interacting with people in an environment that would be typical for that animal but the story is told from their point of view and dialogue is used for the animal character.

### Activity Two

*Note: You may want to integrate this learning experience with your class writing programme and use it as a context for narrative writing. Picture books could also be used as part of the shared reading programme to give exemplar texts that will help students understand how they can construct their text with the necessary features to suit the purpose and audience.*

Students will work together in small groups to write their own 'picture book' about an animal that would be suitable for younger students to read and that provides accurate messaging about that animal. They will work together to write the story and do the accompanying illustrations. As with the texts they selected for the first activity, encourage students to take a more realistic approach than a highly anthropomorphic one.

Once students have chosen an animal that they would like to base their story on, allow them to have time to research the animal, how to care for that animal and information about their natural behaviours so that they have a factual basis for their story. They may also need time after they begin writing to move between the research and writing phases if they realise they have included messages that need fact checking.

Encourage students to think about the purpose and the audience of their picture book. What age children are they aiming it at? How will this influence their choice of vocabulary and the story line? What elements will it need to suit the purpose as a picture book rather than, say, an information report about that animal? How can they ensure that it is factual but still meets the needs of the purpose and audience? As part of this discussion, it may be helpful to look at a selection of picture books as a class and discuss the features that make them suitable for their purpose and audience.

After completing the draft of the story, get students to swap their stories with another group. They can each read through each other's stories with the same critical lens on that they have been using to analyse other texts and provide constructive feedback to the group about any messages or inferences that they may not have realised were present in their story.

Students can publish their books after making the necessary revisions to their drafts. They will need to divide the tasks up among the group members to ensure that everyone is contributing to the published piece.

Once they have completed and published their books they could be shared with a younger buddy class at the school, if this is possible.

## 6. Reflection

### *Learning Intentions*

We are learning to . . .

- Evaluate how these stereotypes can affect people's knowledge of animals as sentient beings with specific needs.
- Explain how stereotypes can affect the welfare of animals.

Students have now engaged with a range of sources of information that present animals in a variety of ways. Before moving on to the final section of this unit take the time to reflect with students on what this all means and why it is important.

Download the [Animal Portrayals Reflection Questions sheet](#) for students to complete. After students have worked through these independently, discuss their responses as a class.

## 7. Discovering the facts

### *Learning Intentions*

We are learning to . . .

- Gain knowledge and develop understandings of animal sentience.
- Develop our understanding of specific animal species and their unique characteristics.
- Use oral, written and/or visual language to effectively convey a message that suits our purpose and audience.

Students have now been exposed to a range of portrayals of animals in society that serve to reinforce stereotypes, messages and impressions of various animal species. They will now choose one of these animals (or another that was not explicitly discussed in the unit but that they know has stereotypes and misconceptions associated with it) to research to discover the facts about that animal and what makes them interesting and unique. When students choose their

animals, encourage the class to choose a wide range of animals so that once they have all completed their projects, they can share their knowledge, and all come away with information about a range of species.

Before launching into their projects, it is a good opportunity to discuss animal sentience as students may not be aware of this important concept about animals. Watch the [Animal Sentience Mosaic video](#) with students; this video explains what the term 'animal sentience' means. You can also show them the following videos which illustrate examples of animal sentience:

[Pig Playing a Video Game](#)

[Let's Ask the Animals – watch until 8:40](#)

To make the link between animal sentience and the content being covered in this unit discuss the following questions with students:

- Why do you think is it important for people to know and understand that animals are sentient beings?
- How do you think some stereotypes and misconceptions may impact on people's understanding of Animal sentience?
- If more people saw videos like those that we just watched, do you think it would change their perceptions of animals? Why/ why not?

Students will begin by carrying out research about their chosen animal. Get students to generate three questions they would like to investigate about that animal to guide their research. Encourage them to generate open ended questions to provide more scope when researching. Also, encourage them to include at least one question about the animal's behaviours or that will address any of the misconceptions that they have found throughout the unit. They could ask questions such as:

- Why do (animal name) do (particular behaviour)? This could be aimed at a behaviour associated with this animal i.e. Why do pigs wallow in mud?
- What is the appropriate diet for a (animal name)? This could be aimed at a common, but incorrect, portrayal of what animals eat i.e. What is the appropriate diet for a cat? Since they are often depicted drinking milk and eating mice.

[RSPCA Kids' Portal](#) has a lot of basic animal care information that students may like to start off with. [OneKindPlanet](#) will be a useful website for students to use for their research as it has information about a wide range of animals and outlines a number of studies that discuss behaviours, emotions and personalities in animals.

*Note: Students may need extra support when carrying out this research if they are using the internet as one of their main sources because a lot of the search results about behaviours will link to scientific studies which are written for an academic audience.*

Once students have found out enough relevant information they can begin deciding how they would like to present their information. As this unit focused on oral, visual and written language, give students the opportunity to choose what form of language (or a combination) they would like to use to create their presentation. Remind students to consider the purpose and their audience as this has been a focus of the unit; teachers may wish to co-construct these criteria with their students.

After students have completed their presentations they can present them to whoever they decided the audience would be and share their learning.



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