

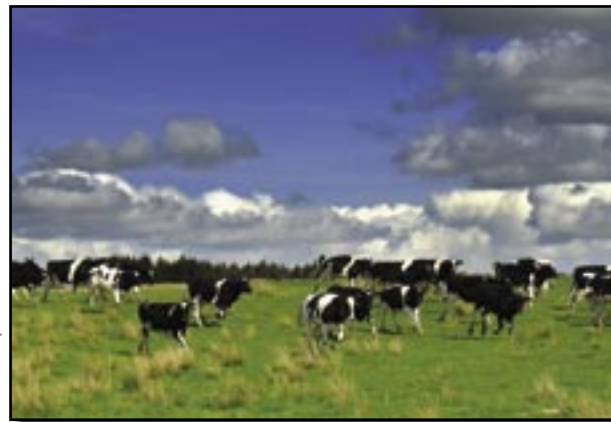
ANIMAL RIGHTS, HUMAN VALUES, SOCIAL ACTION

Unuhia te rito o te harakeke kei whea te kōmako e kō? Strip away the heart of the flax bush, and where will the bellbird sing?



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This proverb, (whakatauki), cited in *The New Zealand Curriculum (2007)* introduction to the social sciences, vividly conveys the interrelationship between humans and the rest of the living world.¹ The bellbird's wellbeing is interwoven with that of the environment, which in turn is essential to the wellbeing of humans, he tangata, who are the subject of the following lines of the whakatauki. This simple image embodies the connections between our understanding of ourselves, our values in regard to nature, and our behaviour towards other species. The resource presented here is designed to foster students' exploration of these same interrelationships, as implied in its title: *Animal Rights, Human Values, Social Action*.



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WHY STUDY HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS?

Animals are intimately bound up with the historical, social, geographical and economic aspects of human life. Many of the key shifts in human societies arose from changes in relationships between humans and other animals. Archaeologists associate the crucial move in ancient times from nomadic to settled societies with developments in animal domestication and agriculture. The word "capital" derives from the Latin term for "head of cattle", which reminds us that in their very origins, our ideas about property, wealth and investment are tied up with the ownership and use of animals.²

Local historians have begun to emphasise the same links between animals and human history. Some have suggested that the discovery of Aotearoa by Polynesian voyagers depended on observing the routes followed by whales and other migratory species.³ Others contend that the development of classical Māori culture occurred in response to the new kinds of wildlife encountered in these islands.⁴ Subsequently the first European visitors and settlers were drawn here by the global trade in seal pelts and whale-oil.⁵ And at the end of the nineteenth century our identity as an agricultural nation was locked into place by the invention of refrigerated shipping and our ensuing dependence on the international meat trade.⁶

In today's world, human-animal relationships still lie at the heart of our most pressing social, economic and geographical challenges. Environmental concerns about climate change, species extinction and habitat loss have everything to do with our agricultural practices, as well as our attitudes towards wild species. The implications of commodity culture, corporate capitalism and globalisation can be explored in very immediate ways by considering the trade in animals and animal products. These are all topics close to the hearts of young people and central to the social studies curriculum.

¹ *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2007), 30.
² Barbara Noske, *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997).
³ Anne Salmond, *Between Worlds* (Auckland: Viking, 1997), 549.
⁴ James Belich, *Making Peoples* (Auckland: Penguin, 1996), 74.
⁵ Michael King, *Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin, 2003), 118-23.
⁶ James Belich, *Paradise Reforged* (Auckland: Penguin, 2001).

HUMAN-ANIMAL RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL STUDIES AND THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM

The New Zealand Curriculum emphasises the central importance of students' learning about "their own values and those of others". Students should "develop their ability to:

- express their own values;
- explore, with empathy, the values of others;
- critically analyse values and actions based on them;
- discuss disagreements that arise from differences in values and negotiate solutions;
- make ethical decisions and act on them".¹

Particular values identified by *The New Zealand Curriculum* as crucial to students' development include respect for oneself and for the rights of others, commitment to fairness and social justice, participation in the community, care for the non-human natural world, responsibility, accountability and ethical action.² The lessons and texts contained in this resource provide ample opportunities for the nurturing of these values by focusing on the questions of animal rights, human beliefs about animals, and social action in regard to human-animal relations.

In encouraging students to explore these themes, the resource invites students to undertake the kinds of inquiry specific to social studies, as described later in *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Hence, students who work through the material contained here will:

- "learn about society and communities and how they function";
- "come to understand the relationships that exist between people and the environment";
- "explore and analyse people's values and perspectives";
- "consider the ways in which people make decisions and participate in social action".³

Finally, the material offered here, while addressing a significant gap, is intended to complement the social studies units currently available for New Zealand classrooms. The lessons are designed to be compatible with others already being used by teachers, especially those on human rights, identity, social movements, globalisation and capitalism. Hence it is hoped that this resource, in its use as well as in its content, will advance the same interconnection amongst different kinds of knowledge, beliefs and action expressed by the image of the bellbird and the flax bush.

¹ *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007), 10.
² *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007), 10.
³ *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007), 30.



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