WORDS MATTER

A Language Guide for Teaching and Raising Kind Kids

FEED A FED HORSE

TAKE THE FLOWER BY THE THORNS

BRING HOME THE BAGELS

ANIMALS ARE 'HE,' 'SHE,' OR 'THEY' —NEVER 'IT'

SOMEONE, NOT SOMETHING

FEED TWO BIRDS WITH ONE SCONE

HOW WATCHING WHAT YOU Say CAN RESULT IN A Kinder WORLD

So you want to inspire the children in your life to be kind and considerate of others, including other animals. Don't we all? Given the national epidemic of bullying and interpersonal violence and its often tragic results—not to mention the mental health challenges and trauma brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic—it's vital that those of us who educate and care for young people set a standard of compassion, starting with our choice of words.

You may cringe now when you accidentally say "kill two birds with one stone," but the English language is riddled with conventions that reinforce **speciesism, the harmful and misguided belief that all other animal species are inferior to humans**. The words we use have the power to influence those around us, especially impressionable young people, who internalize their meanings—whether consciously or unconsciously—and act upon them. Words matter, and as our understanding of social justice evolves, our language must evolve along with it. Just as it has become unacceptable to use racist, homophobic, or ableist language, phrases that trivialize cruelty to animals will also be rejected as more people begin to appreciate animals for who they are.

Speciesism:
the harmful and misguided belief that all other animal species are inferior to humans

There's more than one way to peel a potato.

With so much negativity in the world, why not use language in a way that encourages kindness to everyone, including the other animals we share the planet with? It's an easy switch that can have an enormous impact on the way we view and treat others. Can you imagine what the world would be like if every child learned that "there's more than one way to peel a potato" instead of "skin a cat"? Since we all want to instill compassion in children, the team of former classroom teachers and parents at TeachKind, PETA's youth education division, has created this guide to teaching kids that our attitudes about the treatment of others are conveyed through our language and how to use the power of words as a force for good. Read on to learn easy ways for you and your students or children to think, speak, and write about other animals—you'll be surprised how quickly their empathy grows!

These acts may seem small, but for a child still learning about the world and how to interact with other sentient beings, they can have an indelible impact.

Quick TIPS

ARE YOU AN EDUCATOR? IN THE CLASSROOM OR THE HOMESCHOOL

- Visit **TeachKind.org** or e-mail Info@teachkind.org for more animal-friendly teaching tips, plus free worksheets, lessons, virtual classroom presentations, advice, and more.
- Follow TeachKind on social media:

@teachkindteachers　　@teachkindteachers　　@teachkind　　TeachKind.org/Pinterest　　@teachkind-humane-education

ARE YOU A PARENT OR GUARDIAN?

- Visit **PETAKids.com/Parents** or e-mail us at PETAKids@peta.org for practical advice and resources for raising kind kids, plus free stickers, animal-friendly reading materials, fun activities, and more.
- Follow PETA Kids on social media:

@petakids　　@petakids

What should you do with this guide when you're done reading it? Pass it along to a friend or colleague, or leave it in your local Little Free Library!

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'BUT ANIMALS *Don't Understand* WHAT WE'RE SAYING'

It's important to use animal-friendly language—not to avoid hurting animals' feelings but because, as we all know, children are listening to and picking up on things we say, for better or for worse. Trouble can arise when seemingly inconsequential conversations take on a deeper meaning in kids' minds and influence their view of other species in unintended ways. Unkind language can easily lead to unkind actions—but the opposite is also true. When we foster children's empathy for animals, they also demonstrate more empathy for their peers and exhibit prosocial behavior, which can lead to less bullying and violence in our communities.

> "Watch your thoughts,
> they become your words;
> watch your words,
> they become your actions."
> —Lao Tzu

First Things First:
## HUMANS ARE ANIMALS, AND ANIMALS ARE PEOPLE

Notice how we often say "other animals" instead of just "animals"? That's because humans tend to have such a superiority complex over other species (aka "speciesism") that many forget that we, too, are actually animals—multicellular organisms with the ability to move at will who depend on other organisms for food (unlike plants, which can produce their own energy via photosynthesis). Although the word "person" is almost exclusively used to describe humans, there have been several court cases in which humans have fought for and won another animal's right to legal personhood. For example, Sandra, an orangutan who was imprisoned for 25 years at the Buenos Aires Zoo—10 of them without contact with any other orangutans—was granted legal personhood in 2015. As a result, she was relocated to a sanctuary in Florida, where she enjoys better living conditions and the company of other orangutans, which is vital for these highly social animals. Among the attributes that make someone a person are individuality and consciousness—two things that *all* animals have.

The author **George Orwell** put it succinctly when he wrote, "But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought."
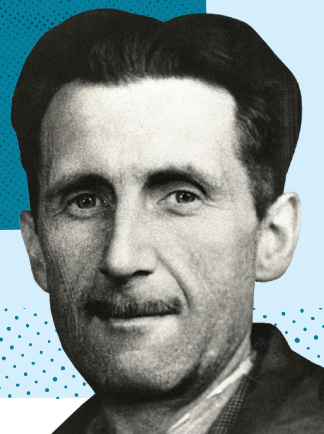
PERSON

PERSON

PERSON

PERSON, PLACE, THING, OR ANIMAL?

Most of us grew up learning that a noun is a person, place, or thing. But ~~hold your horses~~ hold the phone—what category do we put animals in? If we classify them as "things," we're perpetuating the idea that they're just objects like tables and chairs. But tables and chairs don't experience life-or-death consequences if we abandon them. They also don't feel pain or need food and water.

Many compassionate educators have recognized the problems inherent in traditional grammar lessons and are teaching their young students that a noun can be a person, a place, a thing, *or an animal*. Then later, students can go on to learn that there's no need to distinguish between people and animals. Visit **TeachKind.org/Nouns** to download free activity sheets that help children learn this important lesson. Use them in your classroom or share them with your child's teacher.

PLACE

THING

WHAT ABOUT US?

SOMEONE, NOT SOMETHING

A lamp can be referred to as "it," and so can a water bottle. But animals aren't things—they're living, breathing, sentient beings (i.e., someone). Referring to animals as "he" or "she" (or "they" if you don't know their sex) rather than "it" recognizes that they're not research tools, food, clothing, or entertainment machines but people who deserve our consideration. Yes, other animals are people, too!

Referring to other animals as "it" demeans them. For example, *The Associated Press Stylebook* currently recommends using the pronoun "it" for animals who haven't been given a name or had their sex identified by humans. This is ridiculous, considering that the billions of animals on our planet are not inanimate objects but instead have unique personalities, likes and dislikes, and the ability to feel pain and to suffer. The stylebook offers "The cat, which was scared, ran to its basket," but this language suggests that the cat is a thing—in the same category as the basket—not an individual with thoughts and feelings.

Although no compassionate person would intentionally belittle others in this way, it can be a tough habit to break. To practice, you could have students read an article about animals that refers to them as "it," highlighting all the pronouns as they go, and then have them rewrite it using only "he," "she," or "they" when referring to animals.

SHE/HER

THEY/THEM

HE/HIM

SHE/HER

THEY/THEM

HE/HIM

Having trouble breaking the bad habit of using "it" when referring to animals? An "it" jar could help. Every time you or a child in your care calls an animal "it," throw a nickel into the jar. When the jar is full, donate the money to your local open-admission animal shelter—it's a win-win situation. You can also use other small objects, like beads or dried beans, and challenge your class or family to keep the objects below a certain level in the jar. If you're successful, reward kids with something fun, like a visit to the park or extra recess time.

Once it has become ingrained that "it" is a disrespectful word to use when referring to a sentient being, you and your socially conscious youngsters will be able to set a great example for others to follow!

How To Create An 'It' Jar

1. **Find an old jar to decorate and label.**

2. **Place a coin in the jar every time you or another person in your class or house calls an animal "it."**

3. **Remind the people around you that animals are living, feeling individuals and should be referred to as "he," "she," or "they."**

4. **Donate the money you collect to your local animal shelter!**

"IT" JAR

He/She/They Not 'It'

Kind Tip:
PRONOUNS ARE IMPORTANT

All kids should be taught to be respectful, including by using correct pronouns. Although animals can't tell us what their pronouns are, using "he," "she," or "they" is the best way to show that we understand that they are sentient beings, not inanimate objects.

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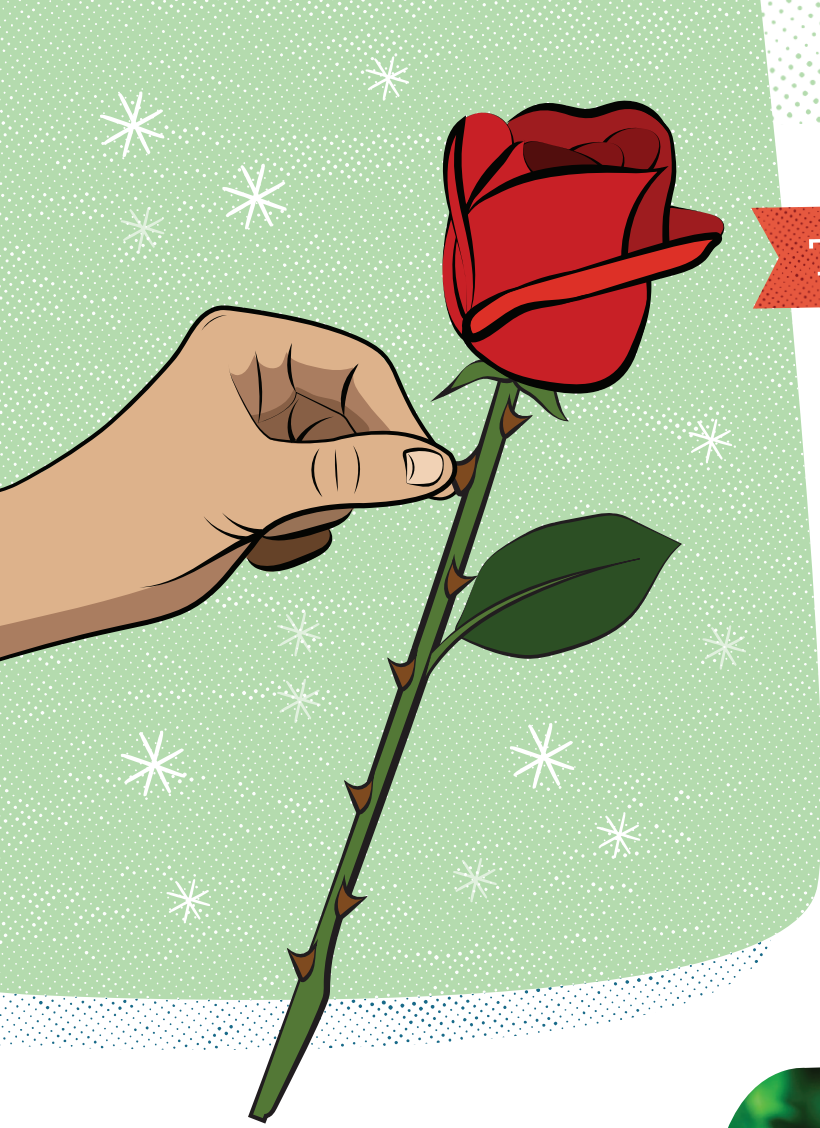
Take the Rose by the Thorns

WITH

ANIMAL-
Friendly
IDIOMS

Most of us grew up hearing common phrases that trivialize violence toward animals. Kind people don't support dogfighting, yet many kind people use the expression "I don't have a dog in this fight." Other problematic anti-animal phrases include "beat a dead horse" and "more than one way to skin a cat." These old sayings are often repeated in classrooms during lessons on literary devices, or adults may use them in casual conversation while in the presence of children. Although they may seem harmless, they send kids mixed signals about the relationship between humans and other animals and can normalize abuse.

Instead of these outdated and harmful phrases, use modern, animal-friendly idioms to teach kids about the importance of choosing words carefully and the power of language to help or harm others. You could also have students create their own artwork depicting other animal-friendly idioms using TeachKind's comprehensive list at **TeachKind.org/Idioms**.

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AVOID CRUEL EXPRESSIONS:	USE KIND ALTERNATIVES:
"Kill two birds with one stone"	"Feed two birds with one scone"
"Be a guinea pig"	"Be a test tube"
"Beat a dead horse"	"Feed a fed horse"
"Bring home the bacon"	"Bring home the bagels"
"Take the bull by the horns"	"Take the flower by the thorns"
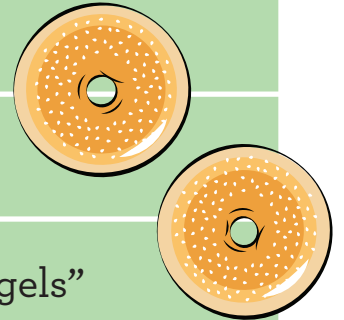
Kind Tip:
DON'T CRY OVER BURNT TOAST

What to Do When You Accidentally Use Anti-Animal Language

We all make mistakes, especially when we're trying to break a bad habit. The best thing to do when you slip up and say something unkind about an animal is to own up to it, correct yourself, briefly explain why what you said was wrong, and then move on. After all, isn't that what we encourage children to do when they mess up? It's good for kids to see adults practicing self-reflection and to realize that their teachers and caregivers are human and make mistakes, just like them. You could say, "Oops! I should've referred to the snake in the video as 'he,' 'she,' or 'they' instead of 'it.' I'll do better next time." Or "Oops! Does anyone know why what I just said wasn't very nice? … That's right—saying 'kill two birds with one stone' makes it sound like it's OK to kill birds, but it's not. I should've said 'feed two birds with one scone' instead. Much better!"

TACKLING *Speciesism* DURING STORY TIME

Let's be real—the world isn't a utopia in which humans and all other animals live in harmony, and the literature we share with kids often reflects that less-than-ideal state. Although there are a number of humane children's books with messages of compassion, empathy, and inclusion (some of which you can find at **TeachKind.org/HumaneBooks**), many classic tales and modern texts are rife with questionable language and themes that depict animals as willing participants in their own suffering. So what's a humane educator or parent to do?

There's no need to replace your entire library. It's important that young learners have access to a variety of literature, and you can use problematic materials to teach kindness. In fact, we encourage it as an opportunity to point out the unkind ways in which humans often depict other animals. Visit **TeachKind.org/ReadingGuide** to learn how to address these issues in some of the most commonly taught stories and create teachable moments by using tales containing messages that are at odds with your compassionate ideals. Here are some quick tips:

- When reading to young children, replace anti-animal language with animal-friendly language. For example, if a story uses the word "it" when referring to animals, simply replace it with "he," "she," or "they."
- If your child is starting to read along with you, pause when you get to an anti-animal word or phrase in a sentence and help determine what to say instead. Start a conversation about the reasons why the language used in the book isn't kind to animals and why the replacement that you discussed is.
- Rather than telling your students directly that it's wrong to exploit animals, allow them to come to that conclusion on their own by asking them a series of thought-provoking questions while reading problematic text.
  - Discuss an act of animal abuse in the story and ask, "Would you do that to your brother or sister, one of your classmates, or your animal companion at home? Why or why not? Should we do it to other animals? Why or not?"
  - Ask students how they think the animal characters felt when they were abused.
  - Point out that we know what the animals in the story are feeling because they can talk, and ask how we can figure out what real animals are feeling. For example, dogs with wagging tails and perky ears are happy and want to play, but if their tails are tucked between their legs and their ears are flat against their heads, they're nervous or even scared.
  - Ask, "What should you do if you see an animal who is hurt or lost?" Explain that if you see a homeless cat in distress, a turtle who has been hit by a car, a dog trapped in a hot car, or any other animal who needs help, you shouldn't assume that someone else will take care of the situation— if everyone thought that, the animal wouldn't receive any help at all. It's important to stop what you're doing and work with a grown-up to call local authorities. If authorities don't respond, call PETA's 24-hour emergency hotline at 757-622-7382. Visit **Teachkind.org/Emergency** for more tips.
  - Ask students what the human characters in the story could have done differently to be kinder to the animal characters.

This Little Piggy
HAD ROAST BEETS
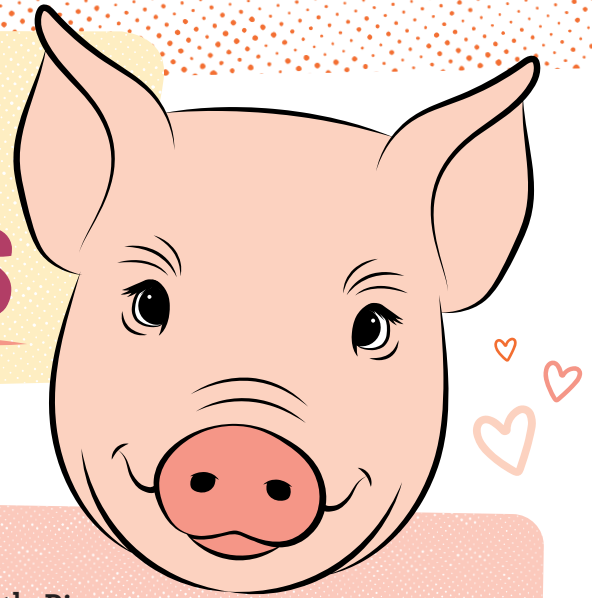
Imagine that you're sitting with a child or your students, singing one of the many nursery rhymes you learned growing up, only to realize that its message is one you don't want to share.

Attitudes toward our fellow animals have changed a lot over the hundreds of years since many nursery rhymes were written. And just as we've given old songs and fairy tales much-needed makeovers to replace racist, sexist, and otherwise insensitive language, we should make sure that nursery rhymes are relevant for kids today and don't encourage speciesism. When singing one of these super-popular nursery rhymes, exchange the outdated lyrics with the compassionate new ones to teach that it's not OK to be cruel to animals. Let's ensure that we're instilling empathy in kids at every opportunity and building the most compassionate generation yet.

This Little Piggy
This little piggy went shopping.
This little piggy stayed home.
This little piggy had roast beets.
This little piggy had none.
And this little piggy laughed "wee, wee, wee"
All the way home.

Visit **TeachKind.org/NurseryRhymes** for animal-friendly versions of "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep," "Little Miss Muffet," and other classic nursery rhymes.

Kind Tip: SPECIESISM IN SONGS

If you studied French in school, you may have been taught the French-Canadian song "Alouette"—but you may not have realized that the lyrics are about plucking a lark. Singing about cruelty to animals in any language is unkind. If your curriculum includes songs about animals, consider whether they inadvertently promote violence. Educators can adapt the lyrics to be animal-friendly, ask students to do so, or have a discussion with students about animals' ability to suffer and feel pain and their desire never to be harmed.

SPECIESIST *INSULTS*

Using terms like "chicken," "pig," "whale," "snake," or "dog" as insults is a form of bullying that not only harms humans but also denigrates and belittles other species, who deserve respect. Plus, these insults' implications about other animals are often inaccurate. For example, chickens are far from cowardly—they fiercely defend their young from predators.

Chickens are ~~cowardly~~ brave.
They defend their young from predators.

Rats are ~~untrustworthy~~ empathetic.
They help out other rats.

Snakes are ~~mean~~ shy.
They are timid and try not to fight.

Pigs are ~~dirty~~ clean.
They eat and go to the bathroom in separate areas.

Sloths are ~~lazy~~ strong.
They're over three times as strong as humans.

Have students create a list of common animal-related metaphors and similes (e.g., "They're as stubborn as mules," "Stop being such a pig," "She's a real dog," "I'll be the guinea pig," or "He was as mad as a hornet"). For each one, have them consider the following:

- What is the intended meaning of the metaphor or simile?
  Example: To be called a "rat" suggests that a person is disloyal.
- What evidence exists to disprove the intended meaning?
  Example: As experimenters have subjected rats to cruel experiment after cruel experiment, they've discovered that rats exhibit empathy and try to help other rats—even those who are unfamiliar to them.
- How can this metaphor or simile be reworded so that animals aren't denigrated?
  Example: "Tattletale" and "snitch" can both be substituted for this use of the word "rat."

Of course, it's wise to remind children that name-calling is never appropriate, no matter who is being insulted. You could also have students come up with metaphors and similes that celebrate animals and their abilities (e.g., "He's as strong as an ox," "I was as busy as a bee," "She has a real eagle eye," and "You're as wise as an owl") or create their own, based on amazing animal abilities.

REDEFINING
OUR LANGUAGE

Many dictionaries define the word "animal" as any nonhuman sentient being. Such definitions reinforce the artificial divide between humans and other animals that fuels speciesism. But when it comes to fundamental feelings like happiness, pain, love, and fear—we're all the same.

- Saying that cows give their milk to humans or that chickens lay eggs for us when in fact both are taken without consent.
  - Most people don't realize that cows produce milk for the same reason humans do—to nourish their young. In order to produce milk at a profitable rate, dairy farms forcibly impregnate cows every year via artificial insemination. Their calves are torn away from them shortly after birth so that the milk intended for them can be stolen and sold to humans.
  - Most chickens used for egg production are kept in very small cages. Several birds are confined to one cage, giving each of them as little space as the size of a piece of paper. Because only female chickens can produce eggs, male chicks are worthless to the egg industry, so every year, millions of them are either tossed into trash bags to suffocate or ground up alive. The hens are eventually killed, too, once they get a little older and start laying fewer eggs.
- Defining animals by how humans exploit them (e.g., "dairy cows" instead of "cows used for milk production" or "circus elephant" instead of "elephant forced to perform in a circus") is speciesist.
- Phrases such as "reel it in" or "get hooked," both of which refer to fishing, an activity that harms fish and other marine animals, normalize abusive activities.
- Using the word "pet" to refer to an animal companion and "owner" to refer to an animal's guardian depicts animals as objects to be possessed. *The Journal of Animal Ethics* released a report from three top universities that confirms what PETA has been saying for decades: The way people talk about animals directly affects how we think about and treat them. Researchers determined that words like "critter," "beast," and "pet" are derogatory and suggest using the much more respectful word "companion" for those we share our homes with. The journal goes on to recommend that we stop calling ourselves "owners," too. We recommend "guardians" or "caregivers."

Ask children to think about the negative connotations of words like "animal," "beast," "vermin," and "pest" and how they can be harmful to animals. Our language is littered with anti-animal phrases and conventions, and this guide doesn't address them all. That's why it's up to you as an influencer in the lives of young people to keep your ears open for problematic language like the following:

We're always noticing the negative impact that language can have on animals and brainstorming creative ways to remedy it. If you or a child in your life have any innovative ideas, please share them with us!
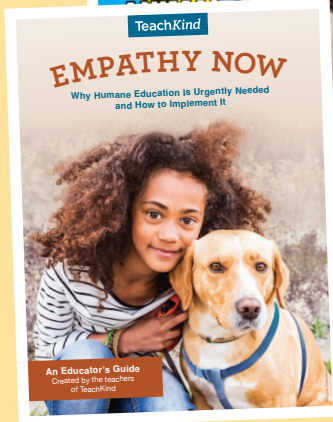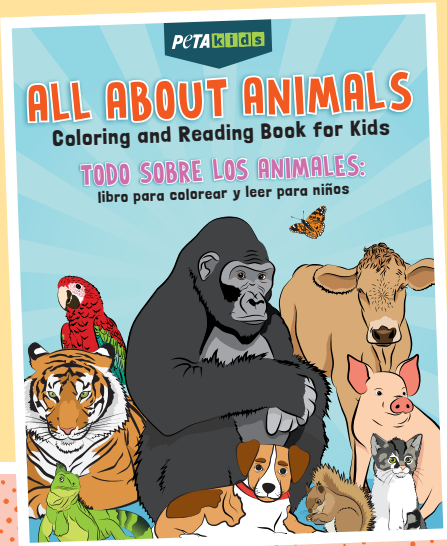
LOOKING FOR MORE FREE RESOURCES?

FREE POSTER INSIDE!

TeachKind
SHARE THE WORLD
THIS CURRICULUM KIT INCLUDES LESSONS, WORKSHEETS, AND TEACHERS' GUIDES FOR GRADES K–2 AND 3–5!

TEACH EMPATHY WITH THIS FUN INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM KIT!

QUIZZES • PUZZLES • HOROSCOPES • DIY PROJECTS
the Kids' Guide to helping animals
FREE STICKERS INSIDE
PETA kids
AMAZING Animal Stories
FANTASTIC

Here is just a sample of the resources that TeachKind offers.

Visit **TeachKind.org** to find all these and more!

PETA kids
ALL ABOUT ANIMALS
Coloring and Reading Book for Kids
TODO SOBRE LOS ANIMALES:
libro para colorear y leer para niños

TeachKind
EMPATHY NOW
Why Humane Education Is Urgently Needed and How to Implement It

An Educator's Guide
Created by the teachers of TeachKind

I HELPED AN ANIMAL TODAY!

HERO FOR ANIMALS

STICKERS!

FRIEND TO ALL BIG AND SMALL

NOW THAT YOU KNOW BETTER, YOU CAN DO BETTER!

Take what you've learned from this guide and put it into action. Create an "it" jar and challenge your class or family to go one week without using anti-animal language. If you succeed, keep up the great work. If you slip up, engage in a thoughtful conversation about the impact of anti-animal language and the ways we can do better for *all* animals.

THANK YOU
for using language to help build a kinder world!

TeachKind

HARMFUL: Beat a dead horse

HELPFUL: Feed a fed horse

Download a free set of idiom posters at **TeachKind.org**!

MEANING: Try to make something happen that has no chance of happening

Teach*Kind*

E-mail us at Info@teachkind.org, visit us on Instagram or TikTok (@teachkindteachers), or check us out on TPT (TeachKind-Humane-Education).