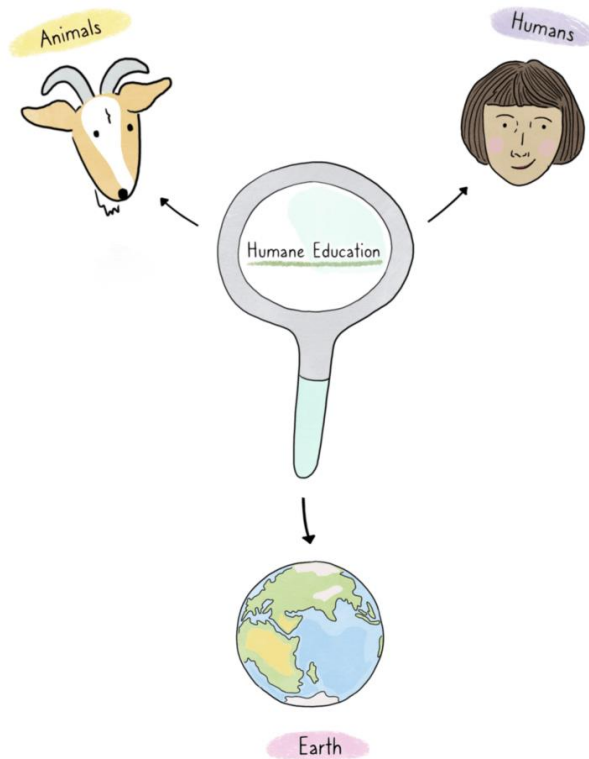


# The Significance of Humane Education in a Sanctuary Setting

From [Open Sanctuary Project](#)

February 2024



Animal sanctuaries offer people a unique opportunity to learn about and engage with the world in a more ecocentric environment, helping learners actively consider the perspectives of nonhuman animals. Whether via [in-person](#) or [virtual education programs](#), sanctuaries can connect their communities to animals in a way other learning environments cannot. As a theory and practice of teaching that is committed to the politics of liberation and representation of the intrinsic value of *all* beings, humane education can help sanctuaries facilitate this connection more effectively with the integration of the pedagogy's core components into their [educational programming](#).

According to the Institute for Humane Education, humane education encompasses four main elements, all of which can comfortably be integrated into a sanctuary setting:

**Element One: Providing accurate information about the issues of our time so people have the information they need to discern fact from opinion and understand the consequences of their decisions as citizens**

As animal advocates, it's important to provide people with [accurate](#) species-specific knowledge. There are countless [false harmful cultural narratives](#) regarding animals that are based in anthropocentrism and misinformation. One important way sanctuaries can counter these narratives is by sharing factual information that helps visitors understand how and why an animal behaves in a specific way, what their needs are both individually and collectively, and how our daily choices impact their lives in both positive

and negative ways. [Accurate](#) life-affirming [language](#) should be at the basis of this practice. Helping others undo how they learned to speak about animals is part of how we can undo [harmful narratives](#).

### **Element Two: Fostering curiosity, creativity, and [critical](#)-, strategic-, and systems- thinking so people can evaluate information and solve problems collaboratively**

Animal sanctuaries are ideal spaces to offer folks a comprehensive worldview in which *all* beings are considered. Sanctuaries can share their [critical thinking](#) skills with their audiences and help them contribute to a collective and personal process of liberation from the catastrophic concepts of speciesism and anthropocentrism. However, in order to dismantle speciesism and anthropocentrism, it's important to educate visitors through a holistic lens that is critical of not only animal exploitation, but also the oppressive systems that enable and reinforce it. Sanctuaries can help their audiences recognize that animal exploitation serves to undermine *all* of us – humans, animals, and the planet – by drawing the connections between animal exploitation and other oppressive forces like environmental degradation, ableism, patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy and more\*.

#### ***\*Wait – how are these things connected to animals?***

When talking about animal exploitation and other systems of oppression, it may be challenging to see that these issues are connected to one another. However, a close look at how any oppressive system works can help clarify the connection. An oppressive system is “one that functions to explain, maintain, and justify institutions, relationships and practices of unjustified domination and subordination” (Karen Warren, *Feminist Environmental Philosophy*). For example, an oppressive system that is *speciesist* functions to justify the domination and subordination of nonhuman animals by humans. All systems of oppression are woven together in an overarching structure of hierarchy and domination. This means a commitment to dismantling oppressive systems like animal exploitation requires the dismantling of all other oppressive systems. Interested in exploring these ideas further? Check out the works of the Combahee River Collective, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Karen Warren, and Aph Ko!

### **Element Three: Instilling compassion, [empathy](#), respect, and responsibility so people have the motivation to face challenges and act with integrity**

Sanctuary spaces can disrupt speciesism when they offer visitors the opportunity to learn about animals as *actors* and *communities* with their own needs, desires, and lived realities. This enables people to draw connections and comparisons between themselves and the animals they meet and nurture [empathic](#) attitudes and behaviors. The goal isn't to convince them that animals are *just* like humans, rather that they are not in opposition to us. They are simply their own unique phenomenon deserving of kindness and respect.

### **Element Four: Offering positive choices that benefit oneself, other people, animals, and Earth**

Humane education allows learners to draw connections between all kinds of social planetary movements in a way that inspires creative solutions to some of the globe's biggest problems, like animal exploitation. One of the ways sanctuaries can inspire creative solutions is by empowering their visitors to become engaged members of their own communities. A humane lens encourages them to ask questions such as: What are the needs of my community right now? What are nonhumans facing in my community? What are humans facing in my community? What are the intersections among them? Issues like pollution, poverty, climate change, animal exploitation, violence, inequality, and hunger make the humane lens a necessity for *everyone*. By exploring the intersections among these issues in their own communities, sanctuaries can provide safe opportunities for their audiences to take action as confident, informed citizens who make choices that align with their values and make a positive impact on everyone.

## Conclusion

At The Open Sanctuary Project, our [mission](#) is to provide responsibly researched and crafted resources with the intention of promoting compassionate animal sanctuary practices. One of the ways in which we are working towards that goal is by developing resources like this that support sanctuaries who want to cultivate a culture of learning and [empathy](#). [Sanctuary education programs](#) can provide [critical-thinking](#) and [empathy-building](#) learning opportunities that help people understand the perspectives of nonhuman animals. In learning to integrate humane education into these learning experiences, sanctuaries can develop as educator-activist spaces that identify local and global social planetary issues and inspire positive social transformation on behalf of animals *as well as* humans and the planet. If you are interested in learning more about humane education and how it can inspire your sanctuary's educational programming, check out the [Humane Education Coalition's Resource Toolkit](#). You'll find books, events, films, funding information, lesson plans, research, and more!

## Sources

- [Academy of Prosocial Learning](#)
- [Resource Toolkit | Humane Education Coalition](#)
- [Institute for Humane Education](#)
- [Teaching Liberation: Essays on Social Justice, Animals, Veganism, And Education | Agnes Trzak, Editor](#)
- [Improving Upper Elementary Students' Humane Attitudes and Prosocial Behaviors Through an In-Class Humane Education Program | William Ellery Samuels et al.](#)
- [Why is Humane Education Important? | P.E.A.C.E. Humane](#)
- [Feminist Environmental Philosophy | Karen Warren](#)