

Humanist ethics: overview (age 7+)



Big question: How can I know what is good?

Key vocab: consequences, empathy, the Golden Rule, responsibility

Knowledge outcomes: Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to ethics		
Believing the reason to be good is because our actions have an impact on others	Thinking for ourselves about what we should do and considering the consequences of our actions	Using empathy and the Golden Rule to help us decide how we should act
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that rewards and punishment are not the only reason to be good • The belief that being good is about promoting happiness and wellbeing, and reducing suffering in the here and now • Being good as a way to make the world a better place to live • The belief that being good can make us happy • Recognising that being good can sometimes persuade other people to be good too – everyone benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that rules and guidance can be helpful but unquestionable rules can create problems • Taking responsibility for our own choices and actions • The belief we can be good without the need for a god or religion – we have the right natural capacities • Considering the impact of our action on other people, animals, and the planet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagining how other people might feel • Treating other people the way we would like to be treated • Believing that a recognition of our shared needs and values can help us think about how to treat each other • Recognising that empathy evolved naturally from the fact that we are social animals who live in communities • The belief that hearing stories about other people can help to develop empathy

Introduction

- Begin with the [‘A humanist approach to life: a summary’ slide](#) to introduce/recap the core features of a humanist approach to life.
- Explain that you are going to explore why humanists believe we should try to be good and how they decide how to act. You could start by asking the students what they think the word ‘good’ means.
- Show the [‘Think for yourself, act for everyone’ slide](#) and discuss its meaning with students.

Motivations to be good

- Carry out the [Sweet shop activity](#) and discuss the different reasons we might be good.

How do humanists decide?

- Share the [Being good information sheet](#) and discuss the humanist approach to ethics (using empathy, thinking carefully, and taking responsibility)
- You could also share the [What is a humanist approach to being good? information sheet](#).
- Show the [The life you can save film](#) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=onsldBanyY&t=2s) about humanist philosopher Peter Singer’s charity and discuss how he tries to use empathy, reason, and evidence to persuade people to do good.

Moral dilemmas

- Carry out the [Moral dilemmas activity](#) to explore how humanists might approach different situations.

Digging deeper: carry out the [The Golden Rule activities](#)

Summary and assessment

- Share and discuss the Multiple-choice questions.
- Carry out the Fill in the blanks activity.
- Review the knowledge outcomes above.
- Ask the students what questions they would like to ask a humanist.