

Part 1 Activity 1
Exploring a Topic
Human Animal Interaction

Human – animal interactions have affected society in major ways, and provide innumerable topics for student research in every curriculum. For as long as humans and animals have co-existed on planet earth, they have interacted with each other. The earliest humans lived by pretty much the same guiding principle as the animals: “Eat or be eaten.” Humans learned they could eat animals and also use their parts for things such as tools or clothing. As animal populations dwindled in certain areas, humans needed to travel or move to find more. They soon discovered that certain animals, particularly the herbivores, could be captured and kept in captivity until, after several generations, they lost their natural fear of their captors. These “domestic animals” provided humans a more dependable supply of food, clothing and even transportation.

Some domestic animals were soon recognized as valuable companions (e.g. dogs), while others were strong enough to become “beasts of burden,” capable of hauling wagons, pulling plows or being ridden. Meanwhile, large wild carnivores such as wolves and mountain lions were seen as competitors for food, and thus were hunted and killed by humans.

As civilization progressed, humans needed more and more resources, such as trees, as building material for their homes, barns, wagons and ships. Trees were also converted to coke, which fueled the factories and allowed ore to be converted into metal. Soon, many of the forests were nearly gone, and the animals which depended on them began to disappear. Laws to protect animals and their habitats were eventually passed, but not before many species were lost forever.

Today, animals are still highly valued by humans. People in some countries use them much as their ancestors did. Animals such as serpents, sheep, goats, wolves, lions, eagles, doves and even cows have all been utilized as symbols or subjects in art, literature and religion. The images and stories of these animals evoke reactions deep within our psyches, and play significant roles in shaping our feelings toward and interaction with certain species. Animal pets number in the hundreds of millions. Sport hunting adds billions to the economy of the USA. Medical research laboratories use dozens of different species to test new products. Parts of animals are used to replace diseased or damaged human organs. Zoos are present in nearly every large city. Seeing-eye dogs guide our blind. Fast food restaurants serve up hamburgers by the billions. Humans could hardly exist without animals!

