Being vegetarian

Video 1
One boy inspires many

A young Buddhist in America explains why he became a vegetarian.

Discuss before watching

- What do you like eating?
- Is there anything you never eat? If so, why?
- What is 'a vegetarian'?

Things to look out for in the video

- What you feel or think as you watch
- What Christopher says
- What his parents thought
- What happens at the end

Watch the video (5.5 mins)

https://video.tzuchi.us/videos/one-boy-inspires-many/

Reflect and discuss

- What did you feel or think, seeing the fish in the restaurant?

Background information

Christopher is a Chinese-American Buddhist. This video was made in the USA for primary schools run by one of the largest Buddhist movements in the world, the Tzu Chi Foundation.

Started in Taiwan in 1966 by its female founder Master Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi began as a local women's project collecting small amounts of money for those in need. Today, it runs secular projects in many countries, informed by Buddhist values, in areas including medicine, disaster relief and education – as well as environmental projects. https://global.tzuchi.org/we-do_environmental-protection



Video 2
Environmental reasons for being vegetarian

It's not just about caring for animals. There are other reasons why many people, including many Buddhists, choose not to eat animals.

Discuss before watching

- What are 'livestock'?

Things to look out for in the video

- Anything you already knew
- Any surprising or new information
- Anything you don't agree with

Watch the video (2.5 mins)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1QnUWZiyvk *(This video is also produced by Tzu Chi USA.)*

Reflect and discuss

- In what ways does raising animals for food affect our Earth (according to the video)?

- What was the video's main message? Did it say everyone should be vegetarian? *[Note: It said, "The main thing is to make conscious and responsible choices about what you eat."]*

Some relevant Buddhist teachings

Ahimsa, or non-harming
The Five precepts
Karma/kamma

Ahimsa and the Golden Rule

The ancient Indian word *ahimsa* means, literally, non-harm. Like many spiritual leaders, the Buddha taught what has become known as the Golden Rule: treat others as you want them to treat you. This takes training: even if we don't mean to harm others, all of us behave unkindly sometimes, through lack of awareness.

The principle of ahimsa is expressed in the Five Precepts, a set of guidelines for living offered by the Buddha for those wishing to move towards Enlightenment by developing wisdom and compassion. (See below.)

The Five Precepts

Unhelpful behaviour	Helpful behaviour
harming living beings	1. loving-kindness
taking things that don't belong to you	2. generosity
being greedy *(for children this is adapted from the original precept relating to sexual behaviour)*	3. stillness and contentment
telling lies or speaking unkindly	4. truthful speech
clouding the mind with alcohol or drugs	5. mindfulness, or awareness

Are all Buddhists vegetarian?

Most Buddhists are not vegetarian. However, many Buddhists do choose to be vegetarian because they do not want animals to suffer, just as they themselves do not want to suffer. (See the first precept and the Golden Rule.)

Some Buddhists choose to be **vegan,** which means not eating eggs, butter or milk or anything else which comes *from* animals. This is because, for example:

- they believe animals suffer in the process of producing eggs and milk for humans (see the first precept) and/or
- they believe things such as eggs and milk belong to the animals who produce them and it's unkind to take things which belong to others. (See the second precept.)

However, there is no rule about this for Buddhists. The Buddha simply said that true happiness comes from doing our best to be kind, thoughtful and generous in all areas of our lives. His Five Precepts are recommendations and it's up to us to take responsibility for deciding how to live by them.

The Buddha himself was not vegetarian. As a wandering spiritual teacher he was dependent on the food people gave him. He couldn't choose.

More information about the Five Precepts
https://windowsintobuddhism.com/topics-11-16/five-precepts-2/

Reflect and discuss

The Buddha could only eat whatever he was given. Can you imagine doing that?!

Karma/kamma

Karma/kamma is another ancient Indian word, which simply means 'action.' This word is found in several ancient religions which began in India. The Buddha's teaching about karma/kamma is that actions have consequences, or results, for us and for others:

Being kind, thoughtful and generous has a positive effect, leading to happiness for us and others.

Being unkind, careless and selfish has a negative effect, leading to unhappiness or suffering for us and others.

If it's true that everything we do, think and say has an effect on us and on others, it's very important that we learn to be more and more thoughtful, kind and generous. As with anything else in life, if we practise, we'll get better at it.

Pupil activity

The wise woman in the video says, "The main thing is to make conscious and responsible choices about what you eat."

Do you know where your food comes from?
Is it good for you?

Write a list of all the different kinds of food in your lunch today.

Talk about and/or research online where all the ingredients come from and how they are produced.

Write about, or give a presentation, about what you have discovered. Now you know more about your food, will you make different choices about what you eat?

Many thanks to the Tzu Chi Foundation.