Humans and Animals

Issues:
How should we define what it is to be human? What similarities and differences are there between humans and non-humans? Is being a human preferable to being a non-human animal?

Learning Objectives:
- Children will be able to distinguish between essential and non-essential properties of things in order to formulate definitions.
- Children will understand how to make classifications and to evaluate criteria in order to re-classify things.

Contains:

- Lesson plan
- Notes and Suggestions

Activity	Content	Outcomes
Independent thinking

5mins | Ask the class to consider the things about them that make them human. This is a classification exercise starting with the listing of properties (characteristics, features and traits) possessed by humans. You may want pupils to write these down in a list. | Introducing classification. |
| Small group work

10mins | Divide the class into small groups. Assign one child in each group as scribe. Ask the groups to discuss their ideas and to compile an agreed list of the properties that make us human beings. These should be put in order of importance, with the essential one at the top and listing a minimum of eight. | Distinguish between essential and non-essential properties. |
| Feedback

5mins | Bring groups back together and ask a reporter from each to give the top three properties from their list. If a property has already been named by another group, they should select the next one down their list. Each property selected in this way should be written on an individual piece of paper and placed on the floor in the middle of the class. | Sharing points and listening to those of others. |
| Open Discussion

Clarification

5mins | Lay out the 'Mind' and 'Body' cards in the middle of the class. These are the sub groups into which the properties that the children have come up with will be classified. Take a couple of minutes to discuss the differences between 'Mind' and 'Body'. This does not need to result in a firm definition but the class will need a working understanding of the differences between the two, in terms of physical (body) and intellectual (mind) properties. | Clarifying in order to formulate definitions. |
| Classification exercise

10mins | Ask for volunteers to place the named properties in one or the other of the sub groups, explaining their selection. Individuals may re-classify a property into the other group once all have been placed, provided they give good justification. Properties whose classification cannot be agreed should be placed in between the mind and body cards. | Classification and re classification. |
| Hot and cold game

10mins | Ask the group to decide which of the properties in each group are the most important for defining human beings and to place them in the corresponding order. Again, differences of opinions should be encouraged where reasons for these are forth coming. | Evaluating criteria. |
| Flash card game

10mins | When ranking of the properties has been largely agreed upon, explain to the children that if their identification of their most important properties of a human is correct then these will be properties that only human beings possess. If other creatures possess these properties and these are the criteria for being a human, the implication is that these too will be humans. Put this to the test by using the animal flash cards. Ask the children to identify which properties these animals have from the list, and discuss the consequences of this in terms of their similarities. | Distinguishing essential and non-essential properties. |

Notes and Suggestions
The class should be encouraged to use their knowledge of human biology and the natural sciences in these activities. If there is sufficient time in an earlier session, the class can create a large picture of a human being, which can be utilised when placing the properties. The essential properties can be placed on or closer to this, and those judged less important, further away. This will also allow for the discussion of where some of the psychological and intellectual properties belong. **Activity 7** For the final discussion, more experienced classes can be introduced to more challenging concepts, moving from the human/animal distinction to discuss the extent to which young babies or maybe disabled people meet the criteria established. The class may also be interested in discussing the extent to which some of the advances in artificial intelligence complicate the criteria for what it is to be a human being (e.g. can both humans and computers use reason).

Key Concepts:
The human/non-human distinction Some philosophers have argued that between certain higher animals (most notably chimpanzees and gorillas) and human beings in general, there are no significant differences. By 'significant', they mean that the differences that exist between our species are not sufficient that they justify our treating these creatures differently from the ways in which we treat human beings. To treat these animals as somehow morally inferior, they claim, amounts to 'speciesism' and is as bad as 'sexism' and 'racism' that modern society rejects as an unacceptable prejudice. Others argue that there are significant differences between humans and other animals which does justify a difference in treatment. One of the criteria most commonly cited is a property of self-consciousness. Evidence for a lack of this in non-human animals is usually associated with a claim that they are 'living in the moment'; that is, that unlike humans, they experience pain only in the moment in which it is inflicted. A human in contrast not only is able to recall past pains but also to anticipate future ones. The lack of ability to recall or anticipate experiences, it is claims, makes for a lower form of consciousness. The contemporary philosopher Peter Carruthers maintains that beings that are not self-consciously in the world in the way in which humans are do not require the same degree of respect, care and attention. Against Carruthers' position, Tom Regan points out that some human beings do not attain a high level of self-consciousness, but this does not lead to us treating them with any less care or respect. Regan concludes that animals should be treated in the same ways that we treat humans who live only in the moment. **Classification:** Labels are very important in philosophical discussion. Should we label, that is classify, a statement as 'knowledge' rather than merely someone's opinion; should we classify something as 'human' (e.g. a computer programme) or non-human? All objects that receive the same label are included in the same class or set. But the key philosophical question is what leads us to either include or exclude something from a class? Are there essential conditions that must be met, or is the order of classification determined by the social norms of our society (merely a repeated convention with no underlying reason)? **Criteria:** The condition that must be met in order for something to be classified in a certain way (e.g., a necessary condition to be classified s a triangle is that a geometrical shape is composed of three straight lines). Criteria for mathematical objects are usually straight forward; but, when considering other objects, there is nearly always room for philosophical discussion (e.g. what are the conditions that must be fulfilled for something to be classified as a human being.

Further Reading:
• Carruthers, Peter (1994), The Animal Issue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) • Regan, Tom (1984), The Case for Animal Rights (London: Routledge) • http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/animals/ • http://www.iep.utm.edu/anim-eth/ • Hamilton, Christopher (2003) Understanding Philosophy (Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd)