TABLE OF CONTENTS

Video Summary & Related Content .................................................. 3
Video Review .................................................................................. 4
   Before Viewing ........................................................................ 5
   While Viewing ......................................................................... 5
   Talk Prompts ......................................................................... 7
   After Viewing ........................................................................ 8
The Story ...................................................................................... 10
ACTIVITY #1: A Closer Look at Veganism .................................... 14
ACTIVITY #2: Persuasive Writing and Marketing ......................... 17
Sources ...................................................................................... 18
Video Review – While Viewing (ANSWER KEY) ............................. 19

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VEGANISM: Meatless Goes Mainstream

Video duration – 15:00

Veganism is on the rise. More and more people are opting away from meat towards a plant-based diet. And in Canada it seems British Columbia is leading the way with more vegans per capita than any other province. The popularity of the “Beyond Meat” and “Impossible” burgers has stormed the market in the past few years. And it’s fueled an avalanche of other plant-based food items. As meatless goes mainstream, it’s become a billion dollar industry. But what is veganism and is it really better for you? Are all vegan foods healthy? Let’s answer some of those questions and look at the science behind the claims.

Related Content on curio.ca

• News in Review, March 2019 – Canada’s New Food Guide: Eating Healthier to Live Better
• Do Canadian schools need a food services makeover? (The National)
• Food for Thought (The Nature of Things)
VIDEO REVIEW
BEFORE VIEWING

To get thinking about what you already know about this subject, answer the following questions as part of a quick write exercise or a class discussion. Your teacher will set a minimum word count.

1. Do you eat meat? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever tried any “meatless” products? Did you enjoy them? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think that veganism is becoming more widespread in Canada?

WHILE VIEWING

1. Plant-based products have become a 50 billion dollar industry.  ❑ TRUE or ❑ FALSE

2. The main reasons for going vegan are
   a. ❑ Concern for animal welfare    c. ❑ Environmental sustainability
   b. ❑ Healthy eating                  d. ❑ All of the above
3. Many vegan companies in B.C. have been purchased by international companies.  ❑ TRUE or ❑ FALSE

4. How many vegans are there in Canada?
   a. ❑ 460 000       b. ❑ 500 000       c. ❑ 2.5 million

5. Can being vegan reduce your risk of getting cancer?
   a. ❑ Yes           b. ❑ No           c. ❑ Maybe

6. Veganism is good for the environment.  ❑ TRUE or ❑ FALSE

7. Emerging evidence shows that people are getting more of calories from ultra-processed and packaged foods, and that people eating higher amounts of these foods have an increased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity.  ❑ TRUE or ❑ FALSE

Donald Watson coined the term “vegan” in 1944. He started a society in England for those who were committed to abstaining from exploitation of animals.
TALK PROMPT

Consider pausing the video and giving students the opportunity to talk to an elbow partner for a few minutes or use these questions as part of a class discussion.

Pause the video after the interview with Diana Bedoya, senior lecturer at Simon Fraser University.

1. What do you see are the main reasons for becoming vegan?
2. What are some of the cautions for those who are vegan or want to become vegan?
AFTER VIEWING

1. Visit a vegan meal recipe site. Pick a meal that you might like to eat. Compare the calories and nutrients listed to a meal that you typically like to eat. What do you notice?

2. Research a company that offers plant-based meat or cheese products. Compare nutritional value, ingredients and cost to the “real” meat or cheese it is replacing. What do you notice?

Some vegans extend their philosophy to include the diet of pets, especially cats and dogs. This practice has been questioned and criticized because of the belief that carnivores need nutrients only found in animal flesh and they lack the required physiology to digest plant matter.
I turned vegetarian two years ago, and it just didn’t feel quite right because there’s so much animal harm with milk and eggs as well that I just wanted to go vegan...

— Unidentified passerby interviewed in this News in Review video

Flexitarians, even omnivores consider vegans as thought leaders and social influencers. So if a vegan says a restaurant is good...that recommendation will go a long way in B.C.

— Sylvain Charlebois, professor in food distribution and policy, Dalhousie University

...Veganism can be good for your health but it depends what you mean by veganism. So, you can be a vegan by eating fries and ketchup and chips and pop all day but does that mean it’s actually healthy?

— Diana Bedoya, senior lecturer, Simon Fraser University
Minds On
How often do you think about the environmental impact of what you eat? Would you be willing to change your eating habits if you believed that the way your food is produced is harming the planet?

Eating and the environment
More and more young people are becoming vegetarians, vegans or flexitarians. This trend may be connected to the fact that many people today care more about the environmental impact of food production on their health and on the planet.

Ethical consumerism
This rise in ethical consumerism has led to innovation and entrepreneurship. Companies who make plant-based foods that look and taste like meat, fish, chicken and cheese are gaining popularity.

A flexitarian is someone whose normally meatless diet can occasionally include fish or meat. People who have a meatless diet but who will eat fish are called pescatarians.
A&W was one of the first Canadian fast food chains to popularize plant-based meat in July 2018. They teamed up with the company Beyond Meat to offer a burger patty made with “100 per cent plant-based ingredients, including peas, rice, mung beans, coconut oil, pomegranates, potatoes, apples and beets.” Beyond Meat specializes in producing plant-based food products. As of July 2019, Beyond Meat had a market value of $15 billion Cdn, a significant increase from a value of $5 billion Cdn on the day of its initial public offering (IPO) on May 2, 2019.

The company was founded in 2009. The profits generated by this company reflects the growing popularity of “meatless” products.

**Plant-based processing**

So how is plant-based meat made? According to the Beyond Meat website, they use “a simple process of heating, cooling and pressure to create the fibrous texture of meat and layer in plant-based fats, binders, flavours and colours.” Many people who

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**What is an IPO?**

An initial public offering is when a private company offers shares of its stocks to the public. It’s called an initial offering because it’s the first time that the company offers up shares to general shareholders. This can also be called “going public.”
eat these plant-based products say that they taste almost identical to animal-based protein.

**A growing trend?**

Other restaurants have adopted the plant-based menu options. In August 2019, a KFC restaurant in Atlanta tested Beyond Fried Chicken on its menu. The product sold out in five hours and outsold a typical week of popcorn chicken sales. Not all tests of this product in the market have been as successful. In June 2019, Tim Hortons began offering three breakfast sandwiches that included Beyond Meat breakfast sausage. They also added two burger options featuring Beyond Burger patties. By September 2019, Tim Hortons had decided to limit its Beyond Meat menu to British Columbia and Ontario, before deciding to phase out these Beyond Meat products entirely.

**Better for the environment?**

Now the real question: Is plant-based meat production better for the environment? The University of Michigan used their life cycle assessment (LCA) of the Beyond Burger to claim that the final product generates 90 per cent less greenhouse gas emissions, requires 46 per cent less energy, has 99 per cent less impact on water scarcity and 93 per cent less impact on land use than the
production of a quarter pound of regular beef. But, while eating a Beyond Meat burger may reduce your carbon footprint when compared to a beef burger, environmental researchers say plant diets are healthier and less carbon emitting than producing processed plant-based products. While debates over which diet is best for the environment continue, the popularity and sales of plant-based meat, chicken, cheese and fish keeps growing.

TO CONSIDER

1. What do you think of the idea of eliminating meat from your diet and choosing a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle? How would your life change? What would become your “go-to” food options?

2. Have you tried a Beyond Meat product? If so, what did you think? If not, would you consider trying one?
Veganism and Indigenous Cultures

Indigenous people are frequently the target of animal rights activist complaints. Whether it is fishing or hunting, vegans claim the Indigenous people are participating in cruelty towards animals. Vegans can be insensitive to Indigenous traditions and history in their activism.

Many cultures, not only Indigenous cultures, include meat as a central ingredient in their dishes and diets. According to writer Rylee While veganism seems to take the environmental and ethical high road, there are some environmental challenges and ethical concerns that come with the vegan lifestyle.

Veganism and Food Shaming

Social media has many examples of vegans espousing their beliefs and adamantly trying to convince others that their way of eating is the best. Videos of aggressive vegans approaching people in restaurants or grocery stores in order to “shame” them away from meat eating has, in some cases, led to a loss of respect for the vegan movement.
McCallin, asking Indigenous communities to give up their values and traditions of fishing and hunting to make up for the mistakes of colonial settlers and industrial capitalism is like asking Indigenous people to apologize for the occupation of land that was rightfully theirs in the first place.

The Cost of Veganism
A vegan diet can cost the same or cheaper than an omnivore diet (people who eat everything) but only if someone lives in a prosperous country or neighbourhood. Some vegan restaurants can be very expensive due to the use of locally-grown produce and organic ingredients. For people on a budget it is often not feasible to spend extra on plant-based products when animal products are cheaper and more accessible.

Negative Environmental Impacts
Veganism is associated with environmental sustainability. However, the growth in popularity of avocados and soy has led to increased deforestation in Mexico and Brazil. Plants like chickpeas, quinoa, cashews, and coconut are being mass produced to meet the new demands of vegans and vegetarians. Getting hummus, cashew butter and coconut milk to consumers can cause negative environmental impacts to lands mostly in the Southern Hemisphere. It can also lead to the
displacement of small farmers and Indigenous peoples around the globe.

TO CONSIDER

1. Do you think the benefits of veganism outweigh its drawbacks? Why or why not?

2. Some vegans have been criticized for scaremongering and moralizing. Research two (2) vegan influencers on social media. Are they using positive messaging or shaming messages in trying to advocate for veganism?

3. Do you think vegans should try to convince others to become vegan? Why or why not?

What's green, tastes great on toast and is a water hog?

ACTIVITY #2: Persuasive Writing and Marketing

Persuasion is the ability to convince someone that your opinion is correct. There are many ways that people try to persuade people. One of the most common techniques is to use emotionally loaded words or images. Other techniques include using famous people or testimonials highlighting positive characteristics. Scare tactics and an appeal to a person’s morality can also be used to persuade. Whatever the technique, an effective persuasion should make a strong argument using evidence and opinion.

1. Explore vegan websites and posts on social media. What are the persuasive techniques being used? Are they effective or not effective in your opinion?

2. Read the information found in “The Complete Vegan Arguments Guide” https://veganspeak.org/vegan-arguments/
   a. Which of the arguments are the most persuasive and why?
   b. Which of the arguments are the least persuasive and why?

3. Create a persuasive ad or infographic that supports a dietary lifestyle that you support.
SOURCES


1. **TRUE.** Plant-based products have become a 50 billion dollar industry.

2. The main reasons for going vegan are  
   d. All of the above

3. **TRUE.** Many vegan companies in B.C. have been purchased by international companies.

4. How many vegans are there in Canada?  
   a. 460 000

5. Can being vegan reduce your risk of getting cancer?  
   c. Maybe

6. **TRUE.** Veganism is good for the environment.

7. **TRUE.** Emerging evidence shows that people are getting more of calories from ultra-processed and packaged foods, and that people eating higher amounts of these foods have an increased risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity.