

Human beings: good and bad

Activity 1: Humans: good and bad

Think about some of your positive and negative features, and the positive and negative features of other people.

- a) In one colour, write as many **negative** features of human beings that you can think of (things we are not very good at, our bad habits, our negative emotions).
- b) In a different colour, write as many **positive** features of human beings that you can think of (things we are good at, our qualities, our positive emotions).

Questions to think about

- 1) Where do these positive and negative features of human beings come from?
- 2) Which features do we share with other animals? What can we do that animals can't?
- 3) What can and can't we change about ourselves?

Activity 2: Human achievements

Think about some of the positive and negative things human beings have done.

- a) In one colour write some of the **negative** things human beings have done in the past and some of the negative things human beings are doing today.
- b) In a different colour write some of the **positive** things human beings have done. Think about what human beings have created and achieved and any progress you think human beings have made.

Questions to think about

- 4) On balance, do you think human beings have been a good thing or a bad thing?
- 5) Is there anything we can celebrate about being human?
- 6) How can we make the best of our human nature?
- 7) What potential do human beings have? Can we make the world a better place?

Activity 3: Human nature

- Create an image of a human being that illustrates both the positive and negative sides of our nature.
- Identify or highlight the features a humanist might think we should celebrate and promote.

Human beings: good and bad (notes for teachers)

We have evolved many physical, mental, and emotional capacities.

The following features of human beings might be considered **negative**

- We are physically limited in terms of our strength and speed
- We don't know everything, we can be irrational, we can get 'stuck in our ways'
- We can be selfish, cruel, violent, and unfriendly to those who are different from us
- We can feel sad, angry, or afraid
- One day we are going to die

The following features of human beings might be considered **positive**

- We can run, jump, climb, and swim; walking on two legs frees up our arms to do other things; our opposable thumbs allow us to build and make things
- The human brain is capable of curiosity, reason, understanding (we can ask and answer questions about ourselves and our world), problem solving, imagination, and creativity
- We are capable of empathy, kindness, friendship, and love
- Language: we can communicate, we can share ideas and experiences
- We are conscious creatures who can plan, we can create purposes for ourselves, and have freedom and agency over our lives
- We can be happy

The humanist understanding of human nature

- Our positive and negative features are all part of being human. They evolved **naturally**. Our capacities were not given to us, but they have evolved to help us to survive.
- We don't have a spirit or soul – we only have **one life**.
- While we can't change everything about ourselves, we can work to overcome our negative feelings and behaviours and promote the **positive**.

The following might be considered **negative** outcomes of human action

- War and conflict, pollution, destruction of the environment
- Sexism, racism, homophobia
- Poverty, inequality, authoritarianism

The following might be considered **positive** achievements of human beings

- Science, technology, electricity, medicine
- Art, music, literature, architecture, sport
- Democracy, education, human rights, social justice, equality (of course, many of these are still works in progress)

Many **humanists** acknowledge that human beings have caused great harm to each other and to the planet throughout history. However, they also recognise the many things human beings have achieved that have improved our lives. They believe we can **celebrate** human progress as long as we recognise that there is still more work to be done. We have a **responsibility** to think about how we can make the best of our **potential** and should encourage other people to do the same – this can help to make the world a better place.