News Debate: Spouting Off

Students dive into the issue of animal rights.

SeaWorld Parks and Entertainment faced a whale of a problem in January 2012 when a judge heard arguments from the animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). PETA claimed that SeaWorld’s treatment of killer whales, or orcas, violates the U.S. Constitution’s 13th Amendment, which bans slavery and involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime.

PETA’s lawsuit is one of many efforts by activists to grant animals greater rights. Animal rights advocates argue that even though animals can’t speak, they experience pain and trauma, and they should be treated with kindness and respect.

In response to PETA, SeaWorld claimed that it treats all animals in its parks humanely. SeaWorld and others who opposed PETA’s effort argued that the Constitution was meant to apply only to humans. Many also believe that granting animals such rights could create problems for industries that use work animals, such as police forces that rely on drug-sniffing dogs.

Though the judge soon dismissed the lawsuit, the situation created a stir about whether animals deserve greater freedoms and protections. Current Events student reporters Jessica Schloskey and Dontaé Brown immersed themselves in the topic.

Animals Have Rights

How would you feel if you were taken from your home, placed in a concrete box, and forced to do tricks for people, whether you felt like it or not? Well, that’s exactly what happened to the orcas at SeaWorld. The treatment is unfair to them, and they deserve to be protected.
Humans are just glorified animals, and we have all sorts of rules and laws to protect us from injustice. All other creatures should have those protections too. Sarah Ludwig, a ninth grader from Belvidere, Ill., agrees. “Animals are a lot more intelligent than we give them credit for,” she says. “They have brains. They have thoughts, feelings, and fears, just like we all do. So why shouldn’t they have rights too?”

As views change and the world progresses, our Constitution evolves. It has been amended to give women and minority groups more rights. If change has happened before, it is only a matter of time before it happens again. Animals of all shapes and sizes should share in the privileges our Constitution guarantees.

**Pro-People**

Rover may be your most loyal companion. However, he’s not a human! PETA’s argument that the U.S. Constitution’s 13th Amendment should protect SeaWorld’s orcas is a misguided attempt to humanize animals. The U.S. Constitution begins with the words “We the People.” That beginning clearly shows that the Constitution was designed for the people of the United States, not for animals.

True, animals are living, breathing creatures, and, as such, they may deserve some rights to protect their well-being. They should not, however, be given rights that were designed for people. Unlike people, animals don’t have a way to communicate their thoughts and opinions.

How can we give animals legal rights when we don’t know how they truly feel?

Finally, giving one animal species constitutional rights could cause an avalanche of court cases by animal rights activists. Can you hear the cries from other animals that don’t want to work? “I don’t like being forced to give milk to anyone,” a cow might say. Oh, wait; animals can’t talk. In the end, the animal rights debate is more about the views of humans than the wishes of animals.
1. What did PETA claim about SeaWorld’s treatment of orcas?

   A. PETA claimed that SeaWorld’s treatment of orcas could create problems for industries that use work animals.
   B. PETA claimed that SeaWorld’s treatment of orcas violates the U.S. Constitution’s 13th Amendment.
   C. PETA claimed that SeaWorld’s treatment of orcas differs from SeaWorld’s treatment of dolphins.
   D. PETA claimed that SeaWorld’s treatment of orcas differs from SeaWorld’s treatment of beluga whales.

2. What argument is presented in this text?

   A. an argument about wearing school uniforms
   B. an argument about the cost of education
   C. an argument about animal rights
   D. an argument about the death penalty

3. Animals should have the same protections from injustice that humans have. What evidence in the text supports this claim?

   A. Animals have thoughts, feelings, and fears, just like humans do.
   B. In January 2012 a judge heard arguments from the animal rights group PETA.
   C. As views change and the world progresses, the U.S. Constitution has evolved.
   D. The U.S. Constitution begins with the words "We the People."

4. Read this sentence from the text.

   "In the end, the animal rights debate is more about from the views of humans than the wishes of animals."

What evidence from the text supports this claim?

   A. Animals don't have a way to communicate their thoughts and opinions, so we don't know how they truly feel.
   B. Animals are a lot more intelligent than people give them credit for.
   C. The orcas at SeaWorld were taken from their home, placed in a concrete box, and forced to do tricks for people.
   D. Animals are living, breathing creatures, and they may deserve some rights to protect their well-being.
5. What is the main idea of this text?

A. As the world progresses and people's opinions change, the U.S. Constitution changes too.
B. Giving one animal species constitutional rights could cause an avalanche of court cases by animal rights activists.
C. Animal rights advocates argue that even though animals can't speak, they experience pain and trauma.
D. A lawsuit filed by PETA against SeaWorld raised questions about animal rights.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

“Finally, giving one animal species constitutional rights could cause an avalanche of court cases by animal rights activists. Can you hear the cries from other animals that don’t want to work? 'I don’t like being forced to give milk to anyone,' a cow might say. Oh, wait; animals can’t talk. In the end, the animal rights debate is more about the views of humans than the wishes of animals.”

What is the tone of the sentence "Oh, wait; animals can’t talk"?

A. sarcastic  
B. surprised  
C. friendly  
D. furious

7. Read this sentence from the text.

“In the end, the animal rights debate is more about the views of humans than the wishes of animals.”

What word or phrase could replace "in the end" without changing the sentence's meaning?

A. Instead  
B. Ultimately  
C. For instance  
D. In particular
8. What does the beginning of the U.S. Constitution show, according to the “Pro-People” section of the text?

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9. Describe the “unfair” treatment that the orcas at SeaWorld experienced. Include three details from the “Animals Have Rights” section of the text.

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10. “PETA’s lawsuit is one of many efforts by activists to grant animals greater rights.”

Using evidence from the text, make an argument for or against giving animals greater rights.

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