

# Quick Fix

## WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?



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This activity explores the question “What makes us human?” In this research-based activity, students will discuss cards and place them into three piles.

The piles are to be:

- HUMANS ONLY
- OTHER ANIMALS
- NOT SURE

### Instructions

1. Deal the cards so that each person in the group of three or four students gets several cards.
2. Each member reads one card at a time.
3. The group discusses the card at length. For example, “Committing suicide.” Are humans the only creatures who commit suicide? Do other animals do it? What about beached whales? Is that a form of suicide? What about lemmings? What about a bird who has lost its mate and will stay by it and refuse to eat? These are just a few of the discussions students raise. (Note: Beached whales are not a form of suicide nor are lemmings. The entire notion of lemmings was derived from a Disney movie back in the 60s!)
4. Once students have discussed the entire deck, begin a class discussion.
5. Generally students are not sure about suicide, homosexuality, opposable thumbs, bipedality, emotions (of course, their dogs show emotions), and abstract thought.
6. Students construct research on their own

at night about a topic they are unsure about. Students then prepare a 250-word explanation of their findings. Be sure to warn them to be careful in their search that they explore appropriate Web sites.

7. The students share their findings during their next day in class in an attempt to come closer to defining exactly what makes us human.
8. Try to identify exactly those traits that make us uniquely human.
9. To the instructor only—Examples include: bipedality, opposable thumbs, abstract thought, art, music and literature, complex brains, long childhoods, committing suicide, and possessing complex interconnections in our brains.

This exercise is just one part of a larger learning cycle on “What makes us human?”

Engaging in homosexual behavior.

Deceiving members of its own species.

Being bipedal.

Responding to the environment.

Exhibiting long childhoods.

Showing emotion.

Committing suicide.

Committing violence against its own species.

Having a large, complex brain capable of abstract thought.

Communicating with other members of its own species.

Creating art, music, and literature.

Showing compassion for family members.

Possessing complex interconnections in the brain.

Having societies that lend themselves to individual action and respond to novel situations.

Possessing opposable thumbs unique for grasping, holding, and manipulating items.

Creating and using tools.

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