Unit 1

ETHICS, RELIGIOUS CULTURE AND DIALOGUE

Develop skills and the ability to explore topics that raise ethical questions.

Identify various forms of religious expression both here and elsewhere in the world. Conduct research to find out more about them and to understand them better.

Try to organize your thoughts and share them with others. Learn from points of view that are different from your own.

These are the challenges awaiting you!
IN THE CHICKEN COOP

The following story is about a farmer, his hens and his goat. This allegory will help you understand important issues related to reflecting on ethical questions and dialogue.

The Intruder
Some fifty hens lived together in a coop. They were lively and in good health. Every day, they produced several dozen eggs for the farmer who came to gather them with pride. All the hens were delighted to offer their eggs to the farmer. It made them feel important. As for the farmer, he fed the hens and made sure they were comfortable. Every day, he gave them good grain. Every morning, fresh straw was laid beneath their tiny feet. The oldest hens got the best beds. These were the rules. The young chicks were happy to make do with smaller beds. Although slightly less comfortable, they were closer to the trough and the chicks could eat at their leisure. Every hen had her place and her role. Everything was as it should be.
One morning in May, Grey, the oldest hen, awoke her companions with a cry as loud as that of an old turkey. “My goodness!” she exclaimed. “Look! A mutant hen!” All the hens turned toward the door of the coop and made a curious discovery. A very strange hen was staring at them with a look of bewilderment in her large black eyes. She was white, with long beige hair, and had two more feet than the rest of them did. She was very fat, and a little beard hung below her odd beak, which produced all kinds of strange sounds. Her feathers were short, straight, and looked rough. Two other beaks grew out from above her eyes. What a strange place for a beak!

Weeks went by. The hens observed their companion but did not go near her. They were afraid.

“What good is she anyway?” one of them asked. “She never lays any eggs.”

“Why is she always chewing? It’s annoying!” another grumbled.

“She has no reason to be here! Her scruffy appearance is an eyesore.”

“Even the farmer doesn’t like her. He only comes to see her for a little while so he can pat her belly.”

The hens were unanimous: this strange creature did not belong in the coop. She was too different. What was she good for? The farmer wouldn’t have brought her without a good reason. What was her role? She was so ugly, maybe her role was to keep away the wolves that lurked in the shadows…

An appeal to prejudice is when a person supports his or her reasoning with a preconceived opinion. These opinions are often dictated by a setting, the time period or education.
George’s Passion

George was a very devoted farmer who loved all animals equally. He had grown very fond of his hens and his goat. Every day, he carefully gathered the eggs that his feathered friends had laid for him. He was grateful for each of the small round gifts that they gave him. George thought his hens were generous. He would have liked to pet them a little but they preferred to keep their distance. So, he was satisfied with just speaking gently to them while he fed them their grain.

George was able to pet the goat, which he had named Dolly. She had a very big belly because she would soon be giving birth. George was thrilled with the idea of welcoming new animals. He had brought Dolly to his farm because he had also hoped she would produce milk, which could be used to make cheese. It was just one of his little ideas.

Dolly was very affectionate. She liked it when George patted her. The hens, on the other hand, didn’t seem to appreciate her as much. Whenever Dolly approached them, the hens ran away and cackled very loudly. The farmer hoped that his animals would eventually manage to get along. He loved them all dearly.
Through Nanette’s Eyes

Nanette was not feeling so well this morning. She had just made a long journey in a box that was mounted to a truck driven by a man she didn’t know. This man had been very kind to her, though. She knew that. He had a calm voice and he was already affectionate toward her. When the truck arrived at its destination, the farmer took her with him, put her in an enclosure and gave her a strange name: “my pretty Dolly.” In this enclosure, she met a new variety of goat. They were dwarves. She had never seen anything like them before. They were very fast, even though their front feet had been cut short. “The poor things!” thought Nanette. “They must be very young because they don’t have any horns yet.” The little beards that grew out of the tops of their heads were quite unusual as well. But the most surprising thing was their coats. They looked like shells made out of fur. And this strange fur was strewn all over the ground. And the smell! This new kind of goat could definitely not be shown at an agricultural fair. They were so ugly! They wouldn’t stand a chance of winning a prize.

After a few days of living together, the goat noticed that her companions produced strange little parcels. The farmer came to carefully collect them every morning. He had been very kind but Nanette had to face the facts: her master was a little bit strange as well. “Oh, well,” she thought, “nobody is perfect.”

An appeal to stereotype is when someone supports his or her reasoning with a rigid and usually negative image of a group of people.
Nanette still thought she was much luckier than her companions because the farmer always patted her when he came into the barnyard. Even though they tirelessly produced all those parcels, the farmer never patted them. “It’s probably because I am more useful than they are,” she thought. “At least I give him milk, and soon I will be giving him some beautiful baby goats.” She was really looking forward to giving the farmer this gift. He deserved it because he took such excellent care of her.

You are already aware that some conditions are necessary for a dialogue to take place. Whether you are having an internal debate or a discussion with others, certain conditions are conducive to dialogue, while others are harmful to it. With your classmates, make a list of the rules to follow when you participate in a dialogue.

Remember: dialogue is not a battle between individuals expressing differing points of view. It’s an exchange that should make everyone feel like a winner in the end.

When you express a point of view, you always do it based on your own unique way of seeing and understanding the world. Your points of view evolve as you grow and come into contact with others.

1. Describe this story in your own words.
2. What messages do you take away from the story?
3. What are the different points of view expressed in this story?
4. Discuss your ideas with your classmates.
Examining ethical questions involves the use of the same basic method every time. To understand a situation completely, is it not better to learn from other points of view? By sharing your point of view with others, you also help them to better understand the situation.

1. Describe what is happening.
UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS PHENOMENA

In your environment, there are various elements with religious significance. These are forms of religious expression. Many of them are rooted in the Catholic religion because this is the religious tradition that has the greatest number of followers in Québec.

Other religious traditions are also present in Québec. Recognizing and understanding religious traditions will help you to better appreciate these traditions. Knowing more about them helps us all to get along.

1. List the major religions that you have heard of.

2. Find one symbol associated with each of them.

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Rafael, 9 years old, Victoriaville

Satya, 11 years old, Montréal

This flower is unique.
It is a lotus flower.
For Buddhists, it symbolizes awakening.

This is a flower.
My mother grows flowers like this in her water garden.

This flower is unique.
My mother grows flowers like this in her water garden.

Satya, 11 years old, Montréal