

Changing the world of Finnegan Fish



by Louise van der Merwe

Changing the world of Finnegan Fish invites young readers on a journey through different viewpoints, discovering that all living beings experience life in their own unique way.

And as we begin to see as others do, we also begin to care with kindness, respect and justice.

*This story forms part of
Nature-based Education's Circle of Sentience series in support of the inclusion of
Animal Welfare in the
United Nations' Rights of the Child
([GC26 Paragraph 35](#))*

<https://docs.un.org/en/CRC/C/GC/26>



THE **HUMANE** TRUST | **NatureBased**
EDUCATION | **EDUCATION** ✿
CAPE TOWN SOUTH AFRICA | A DIVISION OF THE HUMANE EDUCATION TRUST

www.naturebased.education

Copyright : The Humane Education Trust

Changing the world of Finnegan Fish

People sometimes talk about ‘a bird’s eye-view’ – seeing all that’s going on down below, from up above in the treetops, for example.

But what about a fish’s eye-view – seeing the world through water?

Well, I’m a goldfish and I see the world around me from a fish’s eye-view, so let me tell you about the day a young human came into my view – and changed my life forever.

I saw him sitting there as he waited in the reception for Dr D, the dentist, to appear in the doorway to an adjacent room and call his name. He stared at me all the while.

It was as if he marvelled at the sight of me swimming round and round in my glass bowl which was placed on the table in the middle of reception, along with a variety of magazines for patients to look at while waiting their turn in the dentist’s chair.



Under his gaze, I felt a fleeting shimmer of excitement and flipped my tail so that I could show-off a little.

Then Dr D appeared. “Finn?” he said.

Finn jumped up and followed Dr D into the room with its recliner chair and where all the instruments for teeth are kept, but I could still hear them chatting away.

“Do goldfish have teeth?” I heard Finn ask.

“I don’t know,” replied Dr D. “I’ve never thought about it.”

Then he said: “Open wide! Let me look at your pearly whites and if you don’t have any cavities, we may have time to consult the internet about whether goldfish have teeth too.”

There was a hush as Finn opened his mouth and Dr D examined his teeth.



Then I heard him say: “Well done Finn! It is clear that you have flossed and brushed your teeth every day. So there’s time for us to find out if Goldie goldfish has teeth – or not!”

It turned out – I do! (Well obviously!)

“They’re not sharp teeth for cutting or biting,” Dr D read from his phone, “but broad and flat for grinding. They’re called pharyngeal teeth and are much like your molars. You can safely dip your finger in the water if you like and you might feel a gentle nibble.”

“What does Goldie eat?” Finn asked.

“Well, I’ve got fish flakes in this bottle from the pet shop and it’s time for his breakfast so take a small pinch and drop them into the water.”

I flipped to the top of the bowl in readiness.

“Wow!” exclaimed Finn, “he’s ravenous! Look at the way he’s gobbled up his flakes!”



“Let’s see what else we have in common with Goldie – besides teeth and a good appetite”, said Dr D, as he read from his phone. “Apparently, we underestimate the intelligence of goldfish. They are sentient, meaning they can feel pain and misery and contentment and pleasure. They have a good memory, can recognize their care-givers and can anticipate when it is feeding time. They are curious and like to have places in which to hide.”

Dr D looked up from his phone.

“Well,” said Finn, “in that case, we need to get him out of that bowl because there’s absolutely no place to hide in there. It must be an absolute torment to be trapped in the emptiness of a round fish bowl!”

Dr D nodded. “Yes, I agree. You know Finn, you’ve sensitised me to something that I have never thought about before. Every time I look at Goldie from now on, I’m going to think ‘Oh my word! Let’s get you out of there!’ ”

Well, let me tell you, dear Readers, neither Dr D nor Finn could see my smile. We fish don't show emotions on our faces like humans do. So humans think because our emotions are not visible, we haven't got emotions at all! But, believe me, I was smiling in my own way.

They were busy marveling at more information they had found on Dr D's phone. "Just because fish don't have ears, doesn't mean they are deaf," Dr D said. "Apparently, in some ways, a fish's internal organ for hearing surpasses our own hearing abilities because some fish can hear a wider range of sounds than we do."



Just then, Finn’s parents came to fetch him.
“You’ve got a budding ichthyologist in Finn,” said Dr D with a smile.

“A what?” they asked in unison. They chatted on, staring at me all the while, and I learnt that an ichthyologist is a scientist who studies fish. If they only knew! There is so much more that makes me amazing – but I had no way of telling them.



A few days later....

It wasn't long after that, from my fish's eye-view, that I saw Finn again. He and his Dad and Dr D were heads down, working together on something on the table right next to my bowl.

Then came a horrible experience!

Dr D dipped a small net into my bowl. I nearly died of fright as he scooped me out of the water.



However, almost instantaneously I was gently returned to water – but this time – as I was to find out – I was swimming in what was to be my new home, a most delightful big glass tank with bubbles of oxygen and water plants and pebbles at the bottom and empty shells in which to hide and even a toy ship that was meant to look like a wreck at the bottom of the ocean.

Time passes...

Nowadays, Dr D has become my trusted friend. He's given me a new name. I'm Finnegan Fish. He tells all his patients that keeping goldfish in a small round bowl is banned in many countries because it is inhumane to keep a fish like that. And it is. I can vouch for that.

But now... *Wow, I'm living my best life!*



*“Wait a bit, wait a bit, not so fast,” says Dr D.
“You need a friend too, to help keep you company...”*



Key Takeaways for class discussion

- Every living being experiences the world differently
- Understanding others helps us become kinder
- Animals have feelings and needs, just like we do
- Small changes in how we think can make a big difference

'us' and 'them'

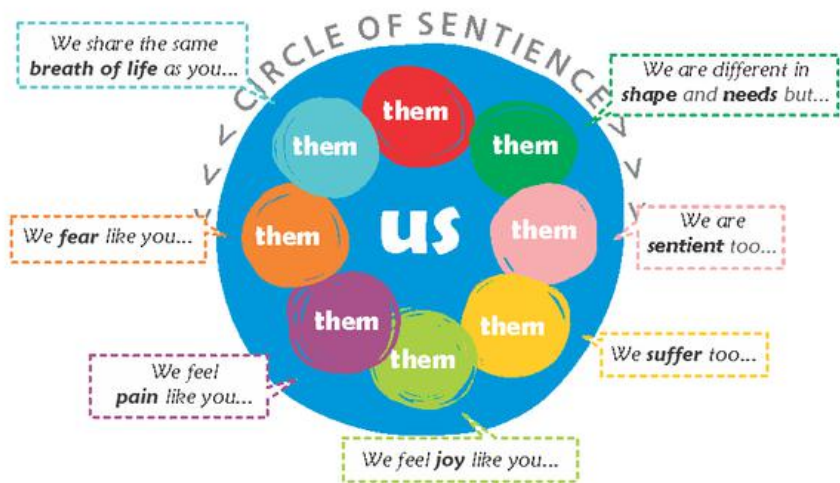
Scientists used to think that only humans are sentient and **excluded** animals from our **Circle of Sentience**.

Now we know better... instead of an **'us'** and **'them'** mentality let us strive to **include** all beings in a universal circle of **sentience, care, respect and compassion**



Remember...

'they', just like 'us' are sentient...



This story is in celebration of
[World Aquatic Animal Day](#)
on April 3, annually



THE **HUMANE** TRUST | **NatureBased**
EDUCATION | EDUCATION 
CAPE TOWN SOUTH AFRICA | A DIVISION OF THE HUMANE EDUCATION TRUST

www.naturebased.education