

# Lesson Plan: Women in Veterinarian Medicine

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## Summary

In this episode of Sketch and Coffee Live at 5:30am Texas time, Blade sketched a veterinarian figurine from Safari Ltd's Women of Industry set. The discussion covered the earliest records of veterinary medicine, the root of the word, the first vet schools, and how women were barred from the profession until the twentieth century. Blade emphasized the role of women in traditional farm animal care, the breakthroughs of Aleen Cust and Florence Kimball, the post-World War II shift from livestock to pets, the critical work of Tracey McNamara during the West Nile virus outbreak, and how the gender balance of veterinarians has completely flipped.

[https://www.youtube.com/live/T\\_7FpP-fu6M?si=Rc-gnA9VmtB-su1h](https://www.youtube.com/live/T_7FpP-fu6M?si=Rc-gnA9VmtB-su1h)

## Objective

Students will understand the origins of veterinary medicine, its terminology, key historical figures, and the social changes that shaped the profession. They will explore how the field shifted from livestock to pets and examine the major role women play in veterinary medicine today.

## Materials

- Whiteboard and markers
- Printed copies of the 9 Fun Facts
- Access to research materials (books, internet, or library resources)
- Optional: images of Aleen Cust, Florence Kimball, Claude Bourgelat, and Dr. Tracey McNamara
- Optional: link to the livestream episode

## Introduction

Begin by asking students: "Who takes care of our animals today?" List answers like veterinarians, farmers, or pet owners. Then ask: "Do you think veterinarians have always cared for pets, or did they start somewhere else?" Introduce the idea that veterinary medicine began thousands of years ago, and much of it was tied to livestock survival.

## Main Content

1. Early records of veterinary medicine in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and India.
2. The word veterinarian and its Latin origins.
3. Bourgelat and the founding of the first veterinary schools.
4. Laws excluding women, and how Aleen Cust and Florence Kimball broke those barriers.
5. The reality of traditional animal care in farm families, especially the role of women.
6. The shift after World War II from livestock to companion animals.
7. The work of Dr. Tracey McNamara during the West Nile virus outbreak.
8. The demographic change in the profession, now majority female.

## Activity

Divide students into small groups. Assign each group one of the 9 Fun Facts. Have them read, discuss, and prepare a two-minute presentation explaining why their fact matters to the history of veterinary medicine. Groups should share with the class.

## Assessment

- Participation in group discussion and presentations.
- Completion of worksheet questions.
- Teacher observation of understanding during class discussion.

## Rubric

Criteria	(4) Excellent	(3) Good	(2) Satisfactory	(1) Needs Improvement
Understanding	Demonstrates full understanding of veterinary history and facts	Mostly accurate with minor errors	Partial understanding, some confusion	Limited or incorrect understanding
Participation	Engages actively, contributes thoughtful ideas	Participates but not consistently	Minimal participation	No participation
Presentation	Clear, well-organized, confident delivery	Organized, some hesitancy	Some clarity, lacks organization	Unclear, unprepared
Worksheet	All answers accurate and complete	Most answers accurate	Some correct answers	Few or no correct answers

## Conclusion

Wrap up by revisiting the opening question: "Who takes care of our animals today?" Emphasize how veterinary medicine grew from survival farming to modern clinics, and how women have moved from being excluded to leading the profession.

## 9 Fun Facts

### 1. First recorded veterinary care

Clay tablets from Mesopotamia around 3000 BCE, papyri from Egypt, and Indian texts like the Shalihotra Samhita all mention treating animals. These early records show that veterinary practice has deep roots in agriculture and religion.

Source: <https://knowledge.rcvs.org.uk/heritage-and-history/history-of-the-veterinary-profession>

### 2. Etymology of 'veterinarian'

The word comes from Latin *veterinarius*, meaning 'of or pertaining to beasts of burden.' This derives from *veterinum* (draft animal), which may be linked to *vetus* (old), and first appeared in English in the 1640s.

Source: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/veterinarian>

### 3. First veterinary schools

Claude Bourgelat established the first veterinary school in Lyon, France in 1761, aiming to control deadly livestock diseases. Another followed in Alfort in 1766, and the first U.S. public veterinary school opened at Iowa State in 1879.

Source: <https://cvm.msu.edu/vetschool-tails/rinderpest-and-the-first-veterinary-school>

### 4. Exclusion and admission of women

Women were kept out of vet schools right up until the early 20th century—official regulations defined 'student' as male only. That barrier fell after the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, and Aileen Cust finally became the first woman officially allowed to register with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in 1922.

Source: <https://www.avma.org/javma-news/2011-06-01/britains-first-woman-veterinarian>

### 5. Traditional animal care

When professional vets weren't available, women and families often served as animal doctors. They bottle-fed calves, mixed herbal treatments, and passed down practical knowledge that kept livestock alive for generations.

Source: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1694293/>

## **6. Cust and Kimball – trailblazers**

Aleen Cust became the first woman officially recognized as a veterinary surgeon in Britain in 1922, after the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 cleared the way. In the U.S., Florence Kimball was the first woman to earn a D.V.M., graduating from Cornell in 1910 and setting a precedent for generations of women in veterinary medicine.

Source: <https://www.vet.cornell.edu/about-us/our-history>

## **7. Shift from livestock to pets**

After World War II, veterinarians increasingly turned their attention away from horses and farm animals and toward companion animals like dogs and cats. This change was driven by suburban growth, rising standards of living, and the cultural rise of pets as family members—creating a booming demand for small-animal veterinary care.

Source: <https://encantopetclinic.com/the-history-of-veterinary-medicine/>

## **8. Dr. Tracey McNamara and West Nile**

In 1999, Dr. Tracey McNamara connected the deaths of crows in New York to human encephalitis cases, identifying West Nile virus in North America. Her work highlighted the critical role veterinarians play in detecting diseases that threaten both animals and humans.

Source: <https://asm.org/magazine/2021/fall/we-are-all-connected-looking-at-the-big-picture-wi>

## **9. The gender flip in veterinary medicine**

In the 1960s, fewer than 5 percent of veterinary students in the U.S. were women. Today, about two-thirds of practicing veterinarians are female, and most vet school classes are 70–80 percent women.

Source: <https://www.digitalisventures.com/blog/notes-on-animal-health-february-2025-a-veterinary-phenomenon>

## Worksheet

Name\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

### Review

1. Where are the earliest records of veterinary medicine found?
2. What does the Latin root vetus mean?
3. Who founded the first veterinary school, and where?

### Discussion

4. Why were women excluded from veterinary schools in the 1800s and early 1900s?
5. How did families practice traditional animal care on farms?

### Data Analysis

6. In 1960, about 5 percent of veterinarians were women. Today it is around 80 percent. Calculate the percentage increase in female representation.
7. How might the shift from livestock to pets after WWII have influenced this demographic change?

### Reflection

8. What do you think it says about society that women were already practicing animal care at home, but were legally barred from veterinary schools?
9. How does the role of veterinarians in detecting diseases like West Nile show their importance to both animals and humans?