

Educational

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Classroom Dissection

Classroom Dissections

The Issue: Classroom Dissections

The Argument

Dissecting animals is unnecessary when we have so many alternatives to dissection including: computer programs and synthetic, anatomically correct animal and human models.

The Other Side

“The animals arrive already dead and die of natural causes”

Tens of millions of animals are bred each year in the US to be used in dissections. There are entire industries that only breed animals for dissection. Perhaps the most famous example of one of these breeding facilities is Martial Bio Resources, a breeding facility that breeds beagles for experimentation⁶. These animals are often killed by gassing, drowning, or suffocation so as to not physically damage their anatomical structures. Their deaths are painful, extended, and unnecessary. Their corpses are viewed as nothing more than dollar signs to their distributors.

Classroom dissections incorporate other industries of animal exploitation. Pregnant animals (most commonly pigs) have their stomachs ripped open and their unborn fetuses removed to be used in classroom dissections³. Homeless animals are stolen from the streets and taken from animal shelters to be used for dissection³.

“It’s educational so it makes it okay”

Humans have successfully mapped out anatomical structures of nearly every animal species known. We know what the inside of their bodies look like. It is redundant and unnecessary to condemn millions of animals to death each year purely for morbid curiosity. Even so, there are plenty of digital and synthetic models available to us.

Learning and education do not make horrific practices acceptable. In the course of Human history we have exploited less fortunate populations to advance medical science. Namely, the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments where scientists refused to inform impoverished black men of their positive syphilis status. This was so they could monitor the progression of the syphilis virus in black men. The Nazis perform experiments on Holocaust victims, in the name of “education” and “scientific advancement.” We collectively agree that exploiting vulnerable populations in the pursuit of medical advancement is abhorrent. Why are non-human animals viewed differently?

The Facts

Where Do They Come From?

Each year in the U.S., an estimated 20 million animals are abused for cruel, archaic teaching exercises, despite the existence of superior non-animal teaching tools. Roughly 10 million are killed for classroom dissection³. Biological supply houses breed small animals such as mice, rats, and rabbits ***specifically*** to kill for classroom dissection. These supply houses also obtain fetal pigs from slaughterhouses that cut them from their mothers’ bodies after their mothers are killed.

Roughly 10 million animals annually , are captured in their natural habitats, taken from factory farms, or bred for the purpose of classroom dissection ³. The U.S. Department of the Interior has stated that amphibian population declines are due in part to the use of these animals in dissection 4

Other animals, such as the cats commonly dissected in biology courses, are obtained from animal shelters, pet stores, backyards, and the streets of the U.S. and Mexico. 4

Consequences:

Not only do these classroom dissections have fatal consequences for the animals. They can also cause psychological distress for students who feel forced into participation. Many serial killers began mutilating animals before they killed their first human victim¹. Teaching impressionable young students that non-human life is simply here for our use, is a stepping stone for them to start to view *all* lives that look different from their own as less than.

Your Right NOT To Dissect:

If you are a student, you have the right to ask for an alternative assignment in place of live animal dissection². Use this as an “in” to discuss with your teachers and school board officials why digital or synthetic dissection tools are better⁵ Check out the resources below to see the wide range of educationally superior dissection alternatives.

The Lingo

- **Dissection**- Dissection is referred to the cutting open and examination of a dead animal for educational purposes.
- **Wet Specimen**- This is a dead animal who is preserved in fluid. Often for the purpose of medical examination but people also use dead animals suspended in liquid for decoration.

The Champions

- PETA TeachKind-
- PETA SOS- Students, join PETA SOS to end dissection a your school

The Resources

1. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/-tracking-animal-cruelty>
2. <https://aavs.org/animals-science/laws/student-choice-laws/>
3. <https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-experimentation/classroom-dissection/>
4. <https://www.protegefoundation.org/blog/ethical-animal-use-dissection#:~:text=About%2020%20million%20animals%20are,mice%2C%20rats%2C%20and%20more>
5. [PDF By HSUS Detailing How To Say No To Classroom Dissections](#)
6. <https://www.thecampbeagle.co.uk/>
7. [PETA TeachKind](#) (share this link with your teachers to encourage them to end classroom dissection)

List of Dissection Alternatives:

1. [eMind Software](#) -
2. [Merge Labs, inc - Merge Cube](#) - The Merge Cube from Merge labs is a cube teachers can purchase for their classroom that, when paired with VR software, lets students “hold” and manipulate a host of biological organisms and interact with them hands on.
3. [Digital Frog](#)- Digital Frog is a downloadable program that integrates comparative anatomy, frog dissection, and ecology. Incorporating high-quality animations and digital

dissections, students can review anatomical systems and body systems for a digital dissection!

4. SynFrog- A product of PETA, this is a hyper-realistic, synthetic model of a frog that can actually be dissected! You get the hands on experience without the murder.

Classroom Pets

Classroom Pets

The Issue: Classroom Pets

The Argument

The placement of animals should put their best interests first. In a classroom setting, it is nearly impossible to provide animals the necessary care while also trying to look after many young human animals. When the school doors close for the day, the animals are left isolated and unattended. Often, the primary reason for teachers getting a “classroom pet” is for the children in the classroom to benefit from the entertainment and educational value obtained from the animal, whereas the primary reason when deciding to take a non-human animal into your care should always be their wellbeing.

The Other Side

“Classroom pets teach kids responsibility”

Many teachers assign the care of the animal to a student for a week or a day. They argue that this teaches the children responsibility and gives them a greater appreciation for non-human animals. This argument does not hold up. By purchasing an animal for human use, you are teaching children that animals are here for human gain. Whether that gain is pleasure, entertainment, education, or any other reason, human children should not be taught that they have a right to use another animal.

Furthermore, the responsibility of taking care of an animal should not be forced on a child. Putting a child in charge of feeding, cleaning up after, entertaining, and exercising an animal is too much to ask of a child who may not want to do that. If the child does not want to care for the animal, they may not do it very well, which will lead to the suffering of the animal.

“It creates an interactive way of structuring math problems and teaching biology”

One argument for having a classroom pet is that math problems (such as how much food the animal will need over x number of days, or what the weight of the animal would be if fed this amount) and biology problems become much more “real world” and interactive with a living example. This argument still revolves around what humans can gain from the animal. Any argument for obtaining an animal that does not put the animal’s best interest first, is a flawed argument. There are plenty of ways to have “real world” educational problems that do not require you to purchase a living, breathing, eating, pooping, sentient animal and imprison them in a cage in your classroom, for their entire life.

“The animal is getting taken care of, why does it matter if we use them for educational purposes”

It is very unlikely that an animal who sits in a cage all day in your classroom is well taken care of. They may have their basic needs met, such as food and water, but that is not the same as providing an enriching, entertaining, loving environment. As a teacher, you have a responsibility to teach your students that animals are not here *for* us, but here *with* us. Animals are not here for us to use in any way, and that includes imprisoning them in our classrooms.

The Facts

Animals Most Commonly Used as “Classroom Pets”

- Rodents or other small mammals
 - Rabbits, hamsters, mice, chinchillas or guinea pigs.
- Fish
 - Betta fish, gold fish, etc.
- Amphibians and Reptiles
 - Turtles, lizards, snakes, frogs.
- Insects, crustaceans, birds
 - Butterflies, hermit crabs, finches, ants, spiders.

Many Animals Face Neglect and Abuse in the Classroom and at the Student’s Home

When school is not open, animals are too often left unattended in the classroom overnight. Leaving an animal unattended for the majority of the day is putting their health and wellbeing at risk. Small

animals like rodents are very susceptible to heat stroke, while reptiles and other cold-blooded animals run the risk of freezing to death. If their heat lamp or pad malfunctions, it only takes a few hours for them to die, even with temperatures as high as 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

Dangers of Weekends and Breaks

Many times, classroom pets are entrusted to the students for care over weekends and breaks. Many children's homes are not screened for proper care. The people and animals living in the home already pose a real risk to the animal. A household full of kids, other animals, and unpredictable circumstances can be a dangerous place for a defenseless animal whose life depends on proper care.

If no student or teacher can take care of the animal for an extended break, they usually end up at an overcrowded shelter where they can contract diseases and contribute to the already overwhelming homeless animal problem.

Emergencies

In the case of a weather or life-threatening emergency it is unrealistic to think that the animal's safety will be considered at all. Realistically, a teacher's top priority will be the wellbeing of their students and the animal will be abandoned in their cage, and left for dead.

Health Risks for Children

The most common animals used for classroom pets are prey animals who defensively bite, nip, hiss or scratch when handled or when they feel threatened. Think of your elementary- or middle school-aged class. Most of these students are unfamiliar with how to properly handle any animal, let alone one who will bite when threatened. **When you place a prey animal in your students' hands, you put their wellbeing at risk.** Some animals also carry diseases, such as *Salmonella*, that can be transmitted through saliva. **Children may also have, or develop allergies to the animal.** What will happen to that animal if they are already in your care?

Wellbeing of the Animal

Rodents and other small mammals are prey animals who instinctively do not show when they are in distress. The animal may have a broken bone, ear infection, failing organ, or parasite and show changes in behavior that are undetectable to the untrained eye. Continuing to let them be handled by children will only exacerbate their problem and potentially put the health of the students at

risk.

Even if you are able to detect that the animal needs to be taken to the vet, are you prepared to take them there? Who will be expected to cover the cost of care? Is there even a vet in your area who will see an exotic animal, a bird, a turtle, an amphibian?

An animal's existence does not end when you go home from school. That animal remains in their cage 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Where Do They Come From?

- Most animals that are imprisoned in classrooms are purchased at pet stores.
- To see why purchasing animals from pet stores is wrong, take a look at our pet store sections.
- Many insects, birds, amphibians, and reptiles are taken from their natural habitat and imprisoned in classrooms.

Animals in the Classroom Are AT RISK¹

Aside from the dangers that can happen when an animal is sent home with a student, animals face danger every second they are left unsupervised even when school is in session. Below are some examples of animal neglect, abuse, and murder as reported to PETA:

- **Arlington, Texas:** A group of high school students strangled a classroom “pet” ferret to death during class, allegedly to elicit a response from their teacher.
- **Beaverton, Oregon:** A gerbil who was sent home with a student endured a broken back and died after being played with recklessly. A rabbit was killed by a dog after being sent home with another student.
- **Cape Coral, Florida:** A rabbit who was allegedly kept with three others in a wire cage at a school died after being chased during a weekend.
- **Helena, Arkansas:** A snake was stolen from his classroom enclosure and cooked to death in a school microwave.
- **Hoboken, New Jersey:** An African dwarf frog died after apparently being overfed by a kindergarten student.
- **Lawrence, Kansas:** A rabbit at the Hilltop Child Development Center died after his tail was apparently pulled off.
- **Melbourne, Victoria, Australia:** A rabbit was found decapitated and the body strewn about the campus, and a guinea pig died from shock at Smith Street Early Learning Centre.
- **Monterey, California:** A goldfish being kept as a “pet” in a middle school classroom was killed after bleach was poured into his water.

- **Orlando, Florida:** Several snails died after students purposefully shook the jars in which they were being kept. The animals were being used as part of a cruel bottle biology experiment in a science classroom.
- **Santa Rosa, California:** A hamster was tortured and killed at Northwest Prep Charter School during a break-in by five juveniles between the ages of 11 and 14.
- **Staten Island, New York:** A hamster was stolen from Eden II School during a burglary and was never recovered.
- **Tampa, Florida:** Nine gerbils died after they were deprived of food and water for more than two weeks, finches died of exposure, and a ball python froze to death in the head of the science department's classroom at Freedom High School.
- **Yorktown, Virginia:** A gerbil in a Grafton High School classroom was allegedly killed by a student who became upset. The student was charged with cruelty to animals.

It Is Never Too Late to Do the Right Thing

Take Them Home: If you have already made the unfortunate choice to take an animal into your classroom, it is not too late to do the right thing. Make the compassionate decision to either bring the animal into your home, where you can more properly care for them, or to find a local animal sanctuary or forever-home where they will live out the rest of their life, happy, safe, and free of a cage. Take this teachable moment to explain to your students why this is the right thing to do.

Change Your School Board's Policy: Whether you are a student, teacher, or concerned faculty or parent, we must do the right thing by speaking up for the animal in danger. Write to your principal or school board members expressing your concerns, or bring it up at the next PTA meeting. Share this page, or any of the attached resources with them. Come up with a plan for the animal once they are removed from the school.

The Lingo

- **Classroom Pet:** It is important to note that while we use the term "classroom pet" throughout this section for familiarity's sake, there is no such thing as a "classroom pet"; only animals who were purchased or stolen from their natural habitat and imprisoned in a classroom.

The Champions

The Resources

¹PETA Article: What's The Problem With Classroom "Pets?"

PETA Kids Article: 6 Reasons Having classroom pets is cruel

Baby Chick Hatching

Classroom Chicks

This Issue: Classroom “Baby Chick” Hatching

The Argument

Hatching chicks in a classroom is always unethical. Similar to buying puppies from a breeder, it is unethical to breed an animal into existence, even if that animal will be cared for properly, while there are animals already in the world who need proper homes. Chicks are taken away from their mothers before they are even born. Once they hatch they have a significantly lower chance of survival than if they were to remain with their mother. And teachers and schools rarely think of an “after” plan for their chicks once they hatch. So, most likely, chickens end up abandoned in the outdoors, abandoned at ill equipped animal shelters, or returned to the breeding facility where they are euthanized.

The Other Side

“I’m going to introduce them to my backyard flock after they hatch.”

Many teachers who have classroom hatching projects have flocks at home that they exploit for eggs or kill for their flesh. If this is the case, then taking the baby chicks home only to be exploited or killed is no consolation. You can then explain to them the issues with backyard eggs ([click here to see our backyard eggs section](#)). If the teacher claims that the chickens will not be exploited for eggs and will just live their lives as companion animals - that is likely mostly untrue - but then ask them why they don’t just adopt a chicken from a sanctuary and introduce them to their flock that way.

Usually the conversation will end up at “I want baby chicks for my flock,” or “I want to provide a learning opportunity for my students.” These are all human centered reasons for bringing a live animal into this world. When dealing with bringing an animal into the world, the primary motive should always be with the best interest of the animals first.

"I am going to send them home with my students after they hatch"

Do the students know how to care for the chicks properly? Have you vetted their home to make sure they have proper, predator proof enclosures? Have you made sure your students' parents have the time, energy, resources and knowledge it takes to keep baby chicks alive and to care for chickens for 5-7 years? If not, then the chicks will most likely die or be abandoned in the outdoors or in shelters.

The Facts

Imagine this, a sperm and egg are fertilized in a petri dish creating a fetus. The fetus is placed in an artificial womb for 9 months. Medical students come by and watch the baby grow. They learn a lot about the development of humans in utero, not anything that hadn't already been discovered and was readily available in their textbooks and research papers. But it was a very cool and interactive experiment that they can look back fondly on. Once the baby comes to full term, they place it in an adoption facility and the baby grows up in foster care. They were never held by a mother, never talked to or sang to in the womb, they never received the love and care needed from a mother at birth.

That is the human equivalent of classroom chick hatching experiments.

Human Health Risks

Because of intensive breeding and egg laying facilities, chicks can be born with the salmonella disease while seeming perfectly healthy. Students who touch and cuddle the newly hatched chicks can catch this disease which is highly infectious to humans.¹

Chicks Need Their Mothers. Even Before Birth.

Like human babies, chicks are meant to be with their mothers. Chickens talk to their babies while they are in the eggs, teaching them to recognize their voice in a flock. Mother hens will communicate with her chicks inside the shell, beginning to teach them how to vocalize their over 30 distinguishable calls.¹ Chicks will even peep back to her from inside the egg! When you separate mother from baby, you destroy this important part of chick development. ⁴

Mother hens carefully rotate the eggs up to 30 times per day to regulate proper temperature, moisture, and positioning conditions. Eggs kept in an incubator can be born deformed. Chicks organs can become stuck to the side of the egg shell if they are not rotated properly.

During the Incubation

There are a number of things that can **go wrong** during the incubation process:

1. Chicks must be kept at exactly 99.5 degrees F. Even a one degree change in temperature for a couple hours will kill the embryo. 5
2. Chicks may hatch on a weekend when no one is there to care for them.
3. Eggs are porous, so improper air flow can suffocate the chicks leading to stillbirths.1
4. Chicks can develop deformities if not attended to with as much dedication as a mother hen. This includes turning each egg up to 30 times per day. 5

After the Hatching²

Taking the chicks home as companion animals is usually not an option for most students or teachers. Chicks and ducklings are illegal to have in most suburban and urban areas. They require expensive and elaborate housing, proper nutrition, and are not seen by most veterinarians. Chickens or ducks raised by humans with no prior experience or knowledge as to how to care for them, live short lives. After the chick hatching experiment, there are a few possibilities to happen to the existing chicks.

1. They are abandoned outdoors, usually at the pond or lake at a park 3
 1. This poses a major threat to the chicks survival as the feathers baby chicks have are not yet waterproof. The feathers become heavy and saturated with water and they can even drown.
 2. Baby ducks or chickens are easy targets for predators and will usually not survive their first 24 hours outdoors.
2. They are abandoned at shelters. 2
 1. There is a homeless animal epidemic and most shelters are already inundated and overcrowded with dogs and cats.
 2. No-kill shelters will most likely turn the animals away on site, while kill shelters accept all animals to prevent them from being abandoned, but will most likely euthanize them.
3. They are given “free to a good home”3
 1. Realistically, these animal will not end up at good homes and are either brought home by hopeful but unprepared teenagers, or fall into the hands of people with more nefarious intent to be used as bait animals or to be tortured.
4. They are given back to the commercial poultry supplier.2

1. When this happens, chicks are almost immediately killed to prevent possible contamination of the flock.

The Alternatives^{1, 2}

Thankfully, there is exactly zero need to have chick hatching experiments in your classroom. We know exactly how chicks develop at each embryonic stage and that information is readily available, for free, anywhere from books to videos, to documentaries, to hands-on learning tools.

- Build an entire lesson plan around Herman the Duck using TeachKind resources- <https://www.peta.org/teachkind/lesson-plans-activities/rescue-story-reading-comprehension-june-2019/>
- Cornell bird lab has live cams where you can watch a Red Tail Hawk hatch- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fz_a7szNlfs
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- A Home for Henny. A children's book about a 3rd grader who adopts a chicken after a school hatching project, and the trials and tribulations that come with it. https://www.upc-online.org/merchandise/humane_child.html
- Video showing video of day-by-day embryo development- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DW3Tw5qpfZQ>

The Lingo

Incubation: This is the stage that happens in the classroom. Chickens' eggs are placed in an incubation chamber for on average 21 days at 99.5 degrees Fahrenheit. This process would be done by the mother hen in nature, but is replaced with a machine for educational purposes.

The Resources

1. <https://www.peta.org/teachkind/humane-classroom/chick-hatching-project/>
2. <https://www.peta.org/teachkind/humane-classroom/whats-wrong-with-hatching-projects/>
3. <https://www.peacehumane.org/2020/08/17/humane-chick-hatching-in-classrooms/>
4. <https://www.thehappychickencoop.com/20-surprising-things-you-didnt-know-about-chickens/#:~:text=Did%20you%20know%20that%20hens,mother%20before%20they%20even%20hatch.>

5. https://www.sites.ext.vt.edu/virtualfarm/poultry/poultry_naturally.html#:~:text=The%20hen's%20body%20temperature%20is,and%20roll%20it%20toward%20her.