

SAYING NO TO DISSECTION

A HANDBOOK FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

Dear Elementary School Student:

In your science classes you may be asked to “dissect” an animal or to do “dissection.” “Dissection” means cutting apart and studying dead animals. These animals--frogs, cats, pigs, mice, worms, starfish, crayfish--were all alive once. They were killed to be used in dissection.

Millions of animals are killed each year for dissection. Many of these animals--such as frogs, earthworms, crayfish and perch (a kind of fish)--are collected from their natural environments. In the process, these environments are damaged. Many frog species are becoming extinct because they are killed in such large numbers.

Cats are also used for dissection. A recent investigation of certain biological supply houses showed that cats used for dissection were killed in very painful ways. Mice, rabbits and pigs are raised in huge “factories,” and killed for dissection.

Cutting up animals for science education is harmful in many ways. It can teach us that animal life is unimportant and that animals exist only for our own use. It can either encourage us to “turn-off” our feelings of care and concern for animals, or to drop out of science altogether, rather than take part in this killing. “Life Science” is the study of life forms and how they are all connected. It becomes a “death science” when animals are killed for science education.

If the idea of harming animals makes you sad or uncomfortable, don't be ashamed or afraid. It's okay to care about animals. You are not alone. Thousands of other students, from elementary school through college, are bothered by dissection and have chosen not to do it.

In fact, in a number of states (California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island) there are laws to make sure that students who have strong feelings against dissection don't have to dissect, or watch the teacher or other students dissect. These laws also state that a student's grades can't be lowered because the student refuses to dissect--the student must be allowed to learn about science in other ways. These other ways are called “alternatives.” Some alternatives and the companies that supply them are described at the end of this booklet and in a pullout section in the middle of the booklet.

Remember, it's okay to care about animals. You have a right to have your feelings respected. If dissection or experimenting on animals in your class bothers you, let your parents know. Explain to them how you feel, and ask for their support.

We at the NAVS Dissection Hotline hope this booklet is helpful. If you need more help or information, please call us at 1-800-922-Frog (3764). There is no charge for this telephone call.

Your friend,

Linda Petty
Director, NAVS Dissection Hotline

Dear Concerned Parent:

Your child's study of science is intended to open his or her mind to a world of discovery, and hopefully, to spark a lifetime of curiosity in scientific topics. At the National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS) we believe that how your child learns may be as important as what they learn.

By requesting information from the NAVS Dissection Hotline, your child has expressed concern about participation in dissection exercises. As a caring parent, please support your child's courageous stand and respect their wish to avoid bringing harm to an innocent animal. Whether for altruistic reasons or a result of common sense, your child has exhibited a mature and compassionate realization that killing should not be part of the process of learning about life.

Although dissection has been a standard in "life" science instruction for decades, today there is a vast array of innovative alternatives in education. Studies have shown that students who use these alternatives learn at least as well, and often better, than those students who dissect animals. Today even medical school students can complete their education without harming animals.

This booklet has been prepared to help you and your child work with their teacher to come up with solutions that respect the ethical concerns of everyone involved without compromising academic standards. Please call us if you have any questions or need additional information. Thank you for supporting your child's efforts to protect animals from needless suffering.

Sincerely,
Peggy Cunniff, Executive Director
The National Anti-Vivisection Society

HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO IF YOU DON'T WANT TO DISSECT.

Talk to your teacher.

Most teachers care about their students and are willing to help. Tell your teacher how you feel. Be sure your teacher knows you are not simply trying to get out of work. Offer to do an alternative project of the same amount of time as the dissection project.

Tell your teacher that realistic models and software are available on loan from the National Anti-Vivisection Society. These alternatives can be used as an innovative teaching tool. Call 1-800-888-NAVS (6287).

Talk to other students.

They may feel the way you do. You may want to start a club or a support group. Remember, there is strength in numbers. If a lot of students feel the same way, a petition may be a good idea. You should present the petition to your teacher and your principal. This will show them that a number of students in your school share your feelings and want an alternative to dissection.

Write a letter to the school newspaper.

Write a letter to the editor, or an article explaining how you feel about dissection. Ask other students to write letters, too.

Ask your parents to help.

They can contact other parents, either individually or through groups such as the PTA. They can even form their own support groups. Teachers, principals and school board members usually listen to concerned parents.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE YOUR FEELINGS AND BELIEFS

When you ask to be given an alternative project, your teacher may agree with you. However, some teachers and school principals believe dissection is helpful, or even necessary, to learn science. It's okay to disagree, but please communicate your feelings in a respectful way.

It's also important that you remain calm when talking with a teacher or principal who has ideas differing from yours. Remember, just because your beliefs are different, it doesn't mean your beliefs are wrong. You have the right to have your feelings and beliefs respected. If you have your parents' support, you should ask one of them to be with you when you explain your beliefs to your teacher or principal. However, you do not have to justify your beliefs to have them respected.

Here's a skit showing how a talk between a teacher and a student might go. It's based on questions that students are often asked. Don't try to memorize the answers. Let the skit be a guide to help you make your own replies.

TEACHER: Everyone has to dissect. It's just a part of learning science.

STUDENT: Not everyone. Many schools and teachers allow alternatives to dissection.

TEACHER: The hands-on experience of dissection and animal experimentation are the best ways to learn biology.

STUDENT: Many teachers disagree. Modern, non-harmful teaching methods and materials are available. They make dissection unnecessary. Students who believe it's wrong to harm animals may learn more from models and computer programs that don't cause pain to animals.

TEACHER: You don't have to worry about harming the animals. The animals are already dead.

STUDENT: If the animals are dead, someone harmed them, because someone killed them. Killing is harming. I believe that animals don't have to be harmed in order for me to learn biology.

TEACHER: Do you eat meat? Do you wear leather?

(If you are vegetarian, and if you don't wear leather, the answer to these questions is an easy "NO"! Whether you are vegetarian or not, the following response is a good one.)

STUDENT: Most people who eat meat wouldn't eat their pets. Most people who wear leather wouldn't make shoes from their pets. Everyone, even people who eat meat or wear leather, draws the line somewhere. I draw the line at dissection. I know there are alternatives which can help me learn about science without harming animals.

TEACHER: You don't have to dissect. The teacher or one of the other students will do the actual dissection.

STUDENT: Just being there makes me a part of it. I'd like to be excused during dissection. Please give me an alternative science project to learn this material instead.

TEACHER: If I allow you not to dissect, what is to stop all students from refusing to dissect?

STUDENT: Any student who honestly objects to dissection should be allowed to do an alternative project.

TEACHER: You are only a child. The school system can't allow students to decide what they will or will not do in class. The school always has your education and best interests in mind.

STUDENT: Although I'm a child, I believe that the lives of these animals should be respected. Dissection takes this respect away. It also takes away my right to respect animals' lives. I know that other school systems offer alternatives to dissection. California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island even have state laws saying that students have the right not to dissect. I only ask for the same respect that other students, in other parts of the country, receive.

TEACHER: If students are excused from dissecting in science class, what will keep students from refusing to run in gym class?

STUDENT: These are two different issues. I'm not trying to get out of work. I will be glad to do an alternative project requiring just as much time and effort. I think a teacher can tell whether a student is serious, or is simply trying to get out of work.

ALTERNATIVE LEARNING MATERIALS

There are many alternatives to animal dissection. They can be as simple as field trips to a nature museum or zoo, exploring local plants and animals at a forest preserve or park, to taking a walk through the playground after a storm. Observing living animals in their habitat, even an artificial habitat, can bring students to a closer understanding of animal life within the ecosystem. The human body can be studied by listening to a classmate's heartbeat, measuring blood pressure before and after exercise or watching the pupils of the eyes when a flashlight shines in them. Observing the functions of the human body teaches much more about anatomy and physiology than viewing a dissected frog.

Creating an interesting and creative environment for learning is challenging for teachers who have so much to teach in a limited time. Most students enjoy animal studies because of the hands-on experience of learning about animals and their anatomy. While some teachers think that a "hands-on" experience with animals means dissection, classroom dissection can promote negative feelings about the value of animal life. Why not instead suggest to your teacher some other projects that can be fun, educational and not harm any animals at all?

Whether you live in a city or in a more rural community, there are many opportunities to study animal life. Schools located in a rural community may have access to farm animals, ponds or streams teeming with life in the fall and spring, and perhaps to a forest environment, all great places for a field trip. The experience of observing animals and how they live, whether pets, farm animals or animals in the backyard provides a great opportunity. The more you learn about the animals ahead of time, the more interesting the lesson will be.

For city schools, where a trip to a farm could take hours, there are zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens filled with insect and small mammal life, nature museums or even a fieldtrip out to the playground in the morning after rain to observe earthworms and how they move. Another suggestion is to arrange with a local animal shelter or humane society to tour their facilities.

Trips to the zoo or a farm are particularly fun when there are newborn animals to be seen. Many zoos and aquariums even have programs where they will bring animals to the school for a close-up look at many small animals and insects.

Studying living animals in their habitats is a great way to learn about comparative anatomy and how our bodies work. Why do some animals have fur or stripes or change color with the seasons? How do human hands compare with those of monkeys? Why do some animals have their eyes on each side of their head and others in the front? There is much to be learned about other animals and about ourselves in studying animals at work and at play.

Models or charts of insects and birds become much more interesting when the class takes the time to go to a wildlife refuge or an open field to try to name as many species as possible. Students can collect photographs from nature magazines or other sources and identify which species live in their part of the country. In warm weather, capturing various types of animal life on videotape can be a challenge for any animal lover. Bees hovering near flowers, squirrels hunting for food in the garbage, ants pouring out of holes in the ground all make for interesting discussions on lifecycles, ecosystems and biological systems.

Another option is using life-like models, interactive computer programs and videotapes to experience animal life that cannot be observed first hand. While these may appear expensive, many students can use them for many years. In comparison, animal specimens are also expensive and can only be used once, and usually by only one to three students. Free loan programs, such as the NAVS Dissection Alternatives Loan Program, make it easy and affordable for individual students, teachers or entire classrooms to use models and computer software. Call us at 1-800-888-6287 for more information on the free loan program.

Respect for life should be taught as a celebration of living things, not as an investigation of dead organisms and how they used to work. Keeping animals captive in the classroom may provide a valuable learning experience, but it may put the animals at risk. A classroom pet needs to be attended to regularly during the school year, on weekends and through long and short vacations. When the school year is over, arrangements must be made to continue to care for the animal. A pet rabbit, hamster, guinea pig, etc., can't be released to take care of itself. They just don't know how.

Another problem is hatching experiments. While the experiment is very interesting and fun to watch, what happens to the chickens once they hatch? The chicks hatch alone, with no mother nearby. In fact, most of the time the chicks are killed. If the science lesson is about growth and life, what does the ultimate lesson teach? While having animals in the class can be fun, think first about whether this is fair to the animal and whether another activity might be better for everyone.

The following teaching materials are samples of what is available. You can suggest these materials to your teachers, principal or school board. A selection of companies that specialize in materials for younger grades follows. We recommend that teachers order catalogs from these companies for more detailed information.

Or call us at **1-800-888-6287** for information on the latest in alternatives to classroom dissection.

CHARTS

Charts include animals and animal classification; lives of the fish, honeybee and rabbit; beneficial insects and birds; human anatomy and body systems; frog anatomy, development, reproduction, etc; and earthworm, fish, snake, grasshopper, clam, starfish and crayfish anatomy.

Charts are available from Carolina Biological, Ward's Scientific, Milliken Publishing Company, and Frank Schaffer Publications.

ACTIVITY BOOKS, COLORING BOOKS

Coloring books with information on animals, butterflies, marine mammals, fish and reptiles can provide primary school students with a fun introduction to the variety of species and colors in the animal kingdom. Some books contain transparencies, duplicating pages, crossword puzzles and teachers' guides suitable for middle school students. Puzzles and other activities are also available.

A variety of materials are available from Dover, Houghton Mifflin (Peterson Guide Series), and from National Geographic.

TEACHER REFERENCE BOOKS

Teacher reference books, describing many forms of animal life and their natural surroundings, can provide a wealth of ideas for projects based on information and the resources available for an individual school.

Books are available from Peterson Guides (Houghton Mifflin), Audubon Guides (Alfred A. Knopf), and Golden Field Guides (Western Publishing).

STUDENT NATURE GUIDES, REFERENCE BOOKS

Many nature guides are available for students, some separate from the teacher guides and others to be used with them. Nature magazines can also provide a lot of different activities in a single issue. Zoobooks are another terrific source of information on specific animals.

Some publishers of student guides are Golden Guides from Western Publishing, Peterson First Guides from Houghton-Mifflin, National Geographic and Zoobooks from Wildlife Education, Ltd.

VIDEOTAPES

Many exciting videos are available about wildlife and individual types of animals.

The National Geographic Society has videos, TV shows and other resources for grades K-12.

MODELS

Lifelike models, many with removable parts, are currently available for a variety of species, including the frog, cat, rat, fetal pig, and shark. A selection of lifelike models are also available for the study of human anatomy, including models of individual organs such as the heart, eye and brain.

These models are available from Carolina Biological, Denoyer-Geppert, Ward's Biology, Nebraska Scientific, NASCO, Connecticut Valley Biological, Fisher Science Education and others.

COMPUTER PROGRAMS

From simple interactive dissection software, to sophisticated 3-D effects, computer technology offers some terrific hands-on alternatives to dissection. Queue offers computer programs including the human body, the animal kingdom and elementary

biology. Cambridge Development Lab offers the study of insects; wildlife conservation; fish inter-action and survival in a mountain lake; and how to identify animals, birds, trees and plants. Also available is a human body lab with light and temperature probes to measure heart rate, lung capacity and responses to light, sound and touch.

Here is a list of some companies that specialize in educational material for younger grades:

Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
400 Hahn Road
Westminster, MD 21157
(800) 726-0600

Cambridge Development Laboratory
86 West Street
Waltham, MA 02451
(800) 637-0047

Dover Publications, Inc.
31 East Second Street
Mineola, NY 11501
(516) 294-7000

Frank Schaffer Publications
23740 Hawthorne Blvd.
Torrance, CA 90505-5927
800-421-5533

Houghton Mifflin Company
Wayside Road
Burlington, MA 01803
(800) 225-3362

Milliken Publishing Company
1100 Research Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63132-0579
(800) 325-4136

National Geographic Society
1145 17th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-4688
(800) 647-5463

Queue, Inc.
338 Commerce Drive
Fairfield, CT 06432

(800) 232-2224 or
(203) 335-0906 in CT and Canada

Western Publishing Co., Inc.
Donovan Distributors
123 Wisconsin Avenue
Oconomowoc, WI 53066
(800) 236-7123

Wildlife Education, Ltd.
12233 Thatcher Court
Poway, CA 92064-6880
(800) 992-5034

OTHER STEPS TO TAKE

Now that you're aware of your right to refuse participation in dissection and know about humane alternatives, you may wish to do more to help animals. Listed are some suggestions:

JOIN NAVS

As a student member of the National Anti-Vivisection Society, you will be kept informed about issues relating to animals in research, education and product testing. Your membership includes a year's subscription to the NAVS *Animal Action Report*, a copy of *Personal Care for People Who Care*, Action Alerts, and access to our library of resources.

BECOME A CRUELTY -FREE CONSUMER

Purchase only those cosmetics and personal care products that are not tested on animals. NAVS regularly produces a guide, *Personal Care For People Who Care*, identifying the animal testing policies of major manufacturers and distributors of personal care products. The most recent edition contains the names and addresses for more than 700 companies that do and do not test their products and ingredients on animals. A copy of *Personal Care* is included with each NAVS membership or can be purchased separately.

ACTIVELY PURSUE HUMANE SCIENCE

Look to science fairs and other extracurricular activities to demonstrate scientific progress achieved without the use of animals. Reference science fair guidelines and encourage your school to adopt rules that prohibit any invasive animal experimentation.

ILLUSTRATE YOUR COMPASSION FOR ANIMALS

Enter the annual NAVS Art for Animals Contest. Submit original drawings, paintings, poetry, sculpture, music or videos that best express your feelings for animal welfare and against vivisection. Call NAVS for details at 1-800-888-NAVS (6287).