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Create a Humane Biology Classroom

Six million animals are dissected in school classrooms every year in the United States.¹ Many schools allow students to opt out of classroom dissections, but for most, it remains mandatory. Students are demanding alternatives, however, and so are their teachers. Research shows that computer modeling gives better learning results and costs far less than the management of live rabbits, pigs, cats and rats.

Scientists with the Humane Society of the United States Biology Consultancy Service have developed a program that helps teachers introduce humane dissection alternatives into their classrooms, custom-designed to fit the curriculum. The Humane Biology Classroom program software packages replicate dissection procedure and, using animation, teach students everything about biology without taking a single life. The NORINA database, from the Norwegian

I personally don't feel dissection is necessary in my class if there's an alternative ... too many pigs die to teach students a lesson that could have been learned on the computer.

— Travis Burnham, high school teacher

Reference Centre for Laboratory Animals and Alternatives, provides a huge database of alternative options for humane classrooms, including loan programs, free products and free demos.

From inexpensive models to elaborate computerized mannequins, alternatives are available almost everywhere to help students learn about the dissection of skin and internal organs without inflicting suffering on animals or causing anxiety in students. Software programs that offer alternatives to dissection are becoming more and more effective and will hopefully replace classroom dissections altogether. Audio-visual methods also provide an excellent understanding of biology. A good video can give a student far more information in 30 minutes than he or she can possibly gain by the same time spent in dissection.

Ethically Sourced Animal Cadavers

This term “ethically sourced” means that animals used in laboratories are not being bred and raised for the purpose of dissection. Instead, programs can be set up between schools and area farms and veterinary clinics. Animals that have died from accidents or illness, or that have been euthanised for good medical reasons, could be donated to schools for classroom dissections. Such a program requires that a school treat the cadavers with respect and dignity. Although still using animals, it takes advantage of tissues and organs that would otherwise be wasted.



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Clinical Practice

Students pursuing a medical career clearly need hands-on instruction before they operate on living creatures, whether human or animal. For veterinary education, clinical observation is a proven effective alternative to dissection. Students can learn by observing, and once a demonstrated level of medical understanding has been reached, they will be eligible to enroll in a training program through a veterinary clinic, for hands-on education.²

A Day No Frogs Shall Die

In 1987, 15-year-old Jennifer Graham made headlines in her home state of California and across the country when she took a stand against dissection. Jennifer refused to dissect a frog that had been killed for that purpose and was given a low mark in class for her objections. So she took the matter to court and, in doing so, brought the case for opting out of classroom dissections into the public eye. In Jennifer's case, the court ruled that she shouldn't have to dissect any animal that hadn't died of natural causes. The decision was a

big one because it led the state of California to pass a law that upholds the right of students under 18 to refuse to participate in "harmful" or "destructive" uses of animals in education.

They won't learn much with their eyes closed, because they're disgusted.

— Amy Richards, student,
Little Chute, Wisconsin

- American Anti-Vivisection Society: www.aavs.org/home.html
- Digital Frog: www.digitalfrog.com
- European Coalition to End Animal Experiments: www.eceae.org/factsheets/A5_Dissection.pdf
- Humane Animals in Education: www.hsus.org/animals_in_research/animals_in_education
- Norwegian Inventory of Alternatives (NORINA): <http://netvet.wustl.edu/norina.htm>
- Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine: www.pcrm.org/resch/anexp/elem_sec_alternatives.html
- Student Rights Option: www.psyeta.org/studentrights.html

Taking a Stand in Las Vegas

In 2002 the Clark County School Board in Las Vegas, Nevada, voted in favor of allowing students to opt out of dissections, given parental support, after a successful petition drive by eighth-grader Laurie Wolff. Two years earlier, in sixth-grade, Laurie had chosen not to participate in a worm dissection that made her feel uncomfortable, and the A student received a C for her choice. Realizing that there were more dissections ahead of her in secondary school, and with the urging of her grandmother, Laurie created the petition for her classmates and presented it to the school board (the sixth-largest in the US) at a 2001 meeting. The board voted unanimously on the amendment, giving 244,000 children the right to choose.