

Conscientious Objection in the Classroom

PHYSICIANS COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIBLE MEDICINE

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About Dissection

Dissection was introduced into education in the 1920s as a way of studying science. It was during a time when people had little or no awareness of the issues involving the use of animals in education.

Approximately half of the animals dissected in elementary and secondary schools are frogs. Others include mice, rats, cats, rabbits, turtles, perch, fetal pigs, birds, worms, and fish. The animals come from breeding facilities, slaughterhouses, their natural habitats, pet stores, local pounds, and even animal dealers and thieves. Most are killed and “processed” at biological supply companies.

Why Be Concerned?

- Biology courses should teach students to value and respect all life, but dissection exercises impart the opposite lesson. Dissection desensitizes students and devalues life by treating living beings as disposable objects.

- Animals suffer through every step in the process leading up to their dissection. They endure inhumane treatment in the way they are collected, transported, handled, raised, and killed.

- Key members of ecosystems around the world, frogs are disappearing fast. Dissection is partly to blame for this depletion because frogs used in school science labs are often captured from the wild. Even frog breeders restock their captive frog population by periodically taking more frogs from the wild.

- Formaldehyde, a substance still commonly used to preserve animals for dissection, is classified as a known human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and as a probable human carcinogen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

- Schools could save money using humane alternatives. For one science class, 30 bullfrogs cost around \$120—a price of

nearly \$3,000 for five years at a school with five biology classes. Many alternatives are less expensive and have been shown to teach as well or better than dissection. For example, the site license for an unlimited number of computers for the CD-ROM *The Digital Frog 2* sells for a one-time cost of around \$750.

Because so many students have refused to dissect, student choice laws have been established in a number of states. But there has always been someone—a student or a parent—at every school who was the first person to say no to dissection. It is not always easy to set a precedent, but one of the most important things you can do is to assert your right to an education that does not violate your principles. Remember, the majority of medical schools, including Harvard, Stanford, Yale, and Columbia Universities, have eliminated all animal laboratories that were once used for teaching.

What You Can Do

Students, parents, and teachers can all act to end dissection. Here's how students can help:

- Ask your teacher if your class will be dissecting animals. Don't wait until the last minute—find out as early as possible in the school year. If a dissection lab is planned, formulate your reasons for refusing to dissect animals. You'll want to be able to explain clearly why you will not participate.

- Prepare a list of alternatives. There are many options, and several organizations will loan you these alternatives for free.

- Tell your teacher that you do not want to dissect, and present your reasons and alternative options. It may be helpful to give your teacher these statements in writing as well.

- If you feel uncomfortable talking to your teacher about dissection, voice your concerns to your parents. Explain why you object to dissection and discuss the alternatives, and they will be able to talk to your teacher for you.

- Do not feel that you have to accept the option of watching other students dissect, as this is still a form of participation.

You have the right to tell your teacher that you want an option that is completely animal free.

- Expect to be given the same tests as the other students, as long as no part of your test involves the use of animals.
- Make sure that your grade will not be affected by refusing to dissect. If your teacher says that you will receive a lower grade, or if he or she refuses your request, take your concern to your principal or school board. In some states, schools are

legally required to allow students to opt out of dissection.

- Encourage other students in your class to join you in refusing dissection. Voice your arguments against dissection to your school newspaper, student government, and any other student forum.

For additional information, please visit www.DissectionAlternatives.org.

Additional Resources

Free alternative loan programs are available from:

National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS)

53 W. Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60604-3795
800.888.NAVS
e-mail: feedback@navs.org
www.navs.org

Ethical Science Education Coalition

333 Washington St., Suite 850
Boston, MA 02108
617.523.6020, ext. 27
e-mail: info@neavs.org
www.neavs.org

American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS)

801 Old York Rd., # 204
Jenkintown, PA 19046
800.729.2287
e-mail: info@animalearn.org
www.aavs.org

Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)

2100 L St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20037
301.721.6439
e-mail: ari@hsus.org
www.hsus.org

Additional information on dissection is available from:
National Association for Humane and Environmental Education (NAHEE)

67 Norwich Essex Tpke.
E. Haddam, CT 06423
860.434.8666
e-mail: nahee@nahee.org
www.nahee.org

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757.622.7382
www.peta.org