

Jenifer Graham:

The First Student to Legally Take on Dissection & Students' Rights

Students from California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia who have an ethical dilemma about dissecting an animal have the right to speak up about cutting into a once living creature and can instead choose an alternative without any objection from a teacher. In these nine states and pending in many others, laws have been passed called Students' Rights Options, which guarantee students the right to choose an alternative to dissection. These laws exist primarily because of legal actions taken in 1987, by then California high school student Jenifer Graham.

As an ethical vegetarian, who did not purchase products that were tested on animals, Jenifer had a genuine love for animals. So, when she objected to dissecting a frog in her biology class and was threatened with a lower grade if she would not perform the dissection, Jenifer, along with her mother and the help and support of animal protection groups, took legal action against her high school. The suit was filed against the school board for insisting that she dissect a frog rather than being offered a viable non-animal alternative. She received a 'C' for not dissecting the frog.

Due to Jenifer's conscientious objection, a four-year legal battle ensued which brought the issue of animal dissection and students' rights to the forefront of the media. The attention from Jenifer's compassionate action even spurred an award winning *CBS School Break* special entitled "Frog Girl: The Jenifer Graham Story". Most importantly, because of the legal steps that Jenifer took, the state of California signed a bill into law in 1998 that mandated that alternatives to dissection be granted to students in elementary and secondary students who objected to dissection on moral grounds.

In the end, although her court case against her school was settled without trial, she was awarded a reinstatement of her grade and received an 'A'. Her high school was ordered to pay legal fees. Jenifer Graham's simple stance against dissection has established a legal precedent that paved the way for future students to object to dissection.