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Parent of pre-schooler in New Jersey

I attribute my admiration and respect for animals to the first humane educators in my life—my grandmother and my mother. My now deceased grandmother, a first grade teacher, was always kind to animals and opened my eyes to nature and all of its beauty. Every morning she fed the squirrels on her small porch. What amazed me was that the squirrels somehow knew that she was a human they could trust, because they would frequently choose to sit and munch quietly in her presence. My mother, who loves and appreciates wildlife, also regularly welcomed stray cats into our home and cared for them, which is something she continues to do to this day.

Witnessing these simple acts of kindness and compassion from my family members solidified who I am today, a person who strives to end injustice towards all creatures through education as a humane educator. There is nothing more fulfilling for me than enlightening students, from elementary through college, about the many different plights of animals. In most cases, students are completely unaware that animals are still used in unnecessary experiments or cut up for dissection purposes in schools. Students need to be taught that they can be compassionate consumers, can purchase products that are not tested on animals, and can use alternatives to dissection if facing this ethical dilemma in their biology classes.

As a mother of a preschooler, I have already faced situations which involve the school bringing in animals who are exploited in zoos and aquaria. I make sure to tell my son's teacher to take him out of these activities, and she complies with no hesitation. Before enrolling our son in preschool, my husband and I had to explain that we were vegans (strict vegetarians who do not eat, meat, dairy, eggs) and do not support animal exploitation of any kind, meaning our son would not attend zoo or aquaria visits and/or participate in activities which involve using products that are animal derived. I am happy to report that my son's teacher has been wonderful about complying with our needs and wishes. One example of a project that the kids were to do in class was to paint eggs. I suggested to the teacher that I would be happy to provide my son with a Styrofoam or wooden egg instead of a real egg. The teacher was fine with this idea. She even suggested that if I wanted to, I could supply the entire class with Styrofoam eggs. I was elated and seized this opportunity to make this activity cruelty-free for all of my son's classmates instead of utilizing eggs derived from egg laying hens who are subjected to deplorable conditions in factory farms!

The use of animals is entrenched in our society, so small victories like this one are gratifying. However, as the days, weeks, and years pass by, the more we realize that situations will arise which will force us to stand our ground and present a differing opinion or more compassionate point of view. Not all teachers will be so accommodating to us. I know this because I speak to parents from all over the country who face teachers who are adamantly opposed to the idea of students using alternatives to dissection.

Since its inception 15 years ago, Animalearn has made significant progress for animals used in education, especially in the realm of dissection. Most recently, as technology has

rapidly advanced, so has the development of humane science education products. In 1996, Animalearn launched its free alternative to dissection loan program called *The Science Bank*, which today includes over 300 innovative CD-ROMs, realistic animal models, charts, posters, videos, and more to assist students and educators who prefer to learn about the life sciences without killing animals in the process. Over 500 alternatives exist not only for anatomy but also for anesthesia and critical care, biochemistry and cell biology, clinical skills and surgery, embryology and developmental biology, histology, pathology, pharmacology, physiology, and psychology.

Due to the wealth of alternate methods available to help teach and learn science, Animalearn representatives advise parents and students that they have the power to make a significant difference for the animals who are being used in the classroom, since these materials are so readily available through free loan programs like *The Science Bank*. A highly recommended and beneficial resource for parents and students who are opposed to dissection to give to teachers is the Animalearn Resource Kit. This comprehensive Kit includes a copy of *The Science Bank* catalog, in addition to a plethora of dissection related materials such as the cost comparison sheet, which breaks down the cost effectiveness of alternatives compared to dissection specimens over a three-year time period. Also inside the Kit is a list of comparative studies of student performance, which shows through a list of scientific studies that students trained using humane teaching methods perform at least as well as or better than those who utilize animals.

Animalearn representatives travel worldwide to showcase the alternatives available in *The Science Bank* and to give presentations to educators, who are interested in knowing more about the digital classroom or the viable and cutting-edge technological methods that are available to them and their students. It is rewarding when we meet a high school biology teacher like Sharon Maselli (whose article is featured in the Winter 2006 edition of the *AV Magazine*) who was once skeptical of dissection alternatives and now embraces this new teaching methodology wholeheartedly

Students tend to have a more difficult time influencing their teachers and professors to allow them to use dissection alternatives. Animalearn receives numerous calls from students who want to know how to approach a teacher with their concerns on this sensitive topic. Fortunately, students from K-12 who live in California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Virginia have the legal right to choose a humane alternative to dissection. Louisiana, Maine, and Maryland offer informal policies, while similar legislation is pending in Massachusetts and Michigan.

Those students who live in states that do not have a legal student choice policy in place still have the right to object to dissection. In many cases, students living in states without protective policies have been successful in encouraging their teachers and/or school districts to allow them to use dissection alternatives.

Student choice policies are important in assisting those students who do not want to dissect, but in many cases students are unaware that these policies are even in place.

Therefore, humane educators need to make schools and school districts aware that these policies exist and request that their students are also made aware of these options.

College and university students need to follow a different path to obtain student choice, since in most cases they do not have an overriding school code that is dictated by a state or overarching governing body. As a result, individual institutions prescribe their own guidelines on issues such as dissection and vivisection in the classroom. Fortunately, many students and student animal protection groups have successfully been able to secure student choice policies at their colleges/universities, including Harvard University, Sarah Lawrence College, the University of Illinois, and Vassar University, to name a few.

Sine my start here at AAVS and Animalearn, I have had the privilege to meet a number of students who work hard to make a difference for animals used in education. Some of their inspirational writings are featured in the Winter 2006 issue of the *AV Magazine*, and I urge readers to follow their lead and educate young and old about how they can make changes for the animals with whom we share our world.