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Educators Awarded for Benevolence & Excellence in Science



Jenkintown, PA (January 2024) – Five standout science educators were honored by the national humane science education program, Animalearn, for their efforts to teach compassion in science in 2023.

Top honors went to Caroline Little, Middle School Science Teacher at Visitation School in Mendota Heights, MN who was selected as Animalearn’s **2023 Humane Science Educator of the Year**.

Animalearn additionally recognized four educators with Honorable Mentions for the important work they are doing to bring compassion into their classrooms and programs. Those exceptional educators are Cynthia Trapanese of San Anselmo, CA; Louise Salerno of Ocracoke, NC; Lauren Apodaca of Las Cruces, NM; and Lisa Salvato of Nashville, TN.

“We are delighted to recognize all these amazing science educators for embracing kindness in their classrooms,” said Animalearn Director Nicole Green.

Caroline Little was selected as Animalearn’s Humane Science Educator of the Year because she excels at bringing animal ethics and an understanding of the natural world to the forefront of all her lessons. She allows her middle school students to explore their environment by instilling an appreciation for all living beings. Caroline believes that dissection is not a ‘rite of passage’ for middle school, and she is able to teach all students without harming animals. Caroline noted in her submission for this award, “With all the advances in technology today it’s possible to learn about the structure and function of body systems without capturing animals from their homes and dissecting them in class.”

After learning about her award Little stated, “Humane science education creates space for our student scientists to harness their curiosity as they explore the world around them with a sense of wonder and appreciation for all the organisms who call our planet home. They are better equipped to understand phenomena, which in turn helps develop a deeper understanding of the natural world and the intersection between human and natural systems.”

Animalearn’s four honorable mentions were also selected for teaching kindness and compassion towards animals in their respective teaching environments.

Cynthia Trapanese, a Lower School Science Specialist at San Domenico School, and Adjunct Faculty at Antioch University, has used a humane education lens to design every lesson in her curriculum. “When we are asked to make connections between ourselves, other human and non-human animals, plants, and the environment, we grow in awareness and often experience awe. When we authentically discover our compassion, we not only want to avoid doing harm, we commit to protecting and advocating, moving from by-stander to up-stander,” said Trapanese.

Louise Salerno, who is the High Grades Science Teacher at Ocracoke School, is rebuilding the science program after Hurricane Dorian destroyed the school a few years ago. She is maintaining a focus on the importance of having students make humane, ethical, and socially just decisions based on scientific reasoning. Upon learning of her honorable mention, Salerno stated, “With the help of Animalearn, Ocracoke School can adopt new humane, non-animal teaching alternatives so our students can continue to “learn by doing” in a compassionate, sustainable, ethical, and socially just way.”

Lauren Apodaca, a Science Teacher at Vista Middle School, prioritizes humane treatment of animals, emphasizing alternatives and promoting a compassionate approach to scientific inquiry. Apodaca stated, “This honorable mention is not only a nod to achievement but represents the importance of understanding the mysteries of our world, about fostering a deep respect for life and promoting ethical stewardship of the world we explore together!”

Lisa Salvato is the 7th Grade Life Science Teacher at Tennessee School for the Blind and uses virtual or alternative animal dissection choices that allow students with visual impairments to gain access and participate independently, or with minimal assistance, in the scientific community. “I believe that all students should be given the same opportunities for learning. Students should feel welcomed and encouraged to pursue their dreams rather than made to feel that they don't fit in or belong. Animalearn provides a safe, hands-on method for all students to delve into the world of science and learn more about the world around them. Most importantly, it instills a love for learning,” stated Salvato.

“These educators are proving it is possible to teach students science with a humane focus at every grade level,” said Alisa Brooks, Assistant Director of Animalearn.

Little reflected on the lasting influence of her science teaching, stating “Students learn that the actions they take to protect species impacts ecosystems from their backyards to half a world away.”

As part of her award, Animalearn will donate \$1,500 worth of anatomical models to Little. All honorable mentions will receive humane science education resources valued at \$750 each.

Animalearn, a division of the American Anti-Vivisection Society, works with educators, students, policy makers and others to achieve quality humane science education without the harmful use of animals. Animalearn’s free loan program, The Science Bank, offers humane science products that enable educators to teach and students to learn anatomy, physiology, and psychology lessons without harming animals. For more information visit TheScienceBank.org