

Discussion and Notes

Keep a copy of these safety training notes and a signed attendance sheet to verify regular safety training.

Regulatory inspectors will usually request proof of safety training.

The “Classroom Living Material—Care and Culture Guide” available from Flinn Scientific Canada (Catalogue No. FB1747) is an excellent resource for instructors wishing to establish “living” classrooms. The guide provides valuable information on all aspects of caring for organisms, from microscopic algae to amphibians and reptiles.

Live Animals in the Classroom

Studying living organisms in biology and life science is a “natural” way to engage students and nurture their interest in biology. Keeping live animals requires thoughtful consideration of learning goals, school policies, and potential dangers.

Learning Goals and Objectives

The first consideration should be the learning goals for using living organisms in the classroom, to provide meaningful educational experiences for students. The use of living organisms enhances the study of life processes especially with respect to the behaviour of organisms. Review life science standards and course goals to determine where the use of living organisms is appropriate. The presence of live animals may stimulate interest, help students develop observational skills, illustrate principles of behaviour, regulation, and adaptation of organisms, promote positive attitudes, and foster a sense of empathy. The learning goals should be clearly defined and referenced.

Responsible Care of Animals

Implicit in the use of animals in the classroom are the planning, responsibility, and effort required for their proper procurement, humane care, and ultimate disposition or fate. Sound instructor judgment and concern for the well-being of the animals are essential requirements or considerations. A captive animal is totally dependent upon its keeper. The instructor assumes the responsibility for providing food and shelter and for ensuring that the animal is healthy, comfortable, and able to maintain reasonable natural behaviour. In addition to addressing specific learning goals, the instructor should always exhibit a caring and sensitive attitude toward the animal.

School Policies and Legal Considerations

Your school may have general policies or specific rules regarding classroom animals. Consult the science coordinator and other administrators for advice and recommendations. Many native animals—especially fur-bearing animals, most birds, and threatened or endangered species—are protected by federal or state regulations and cannot be collected or maintained without a permit. Federal regulations restrict the importation of many animals, and some states prohibit importing and keeping non-native species that can cause ecological damage if they are released or escape. State wildlife agencies are familiar with these regulations and can provide information on animals that are protected in different areas.

General Guidelines

- ◆ Every species is unique. It is important to learn as much as possible about a specific organism or animal before bringing it into the classroom. Learn especially the animal’s habits and unique care requirements. Enlist student help in researching prospective animals—become experts before the organisms arrive!
- ◆ Rely on reputable biological suppliers who can provide healthy and vigorous live organisms, will deliver them in a timely manner, and can provide technical support.
- ◆ Plan a timeline that allows for the arrival of the organisms prior to the day(s) they will be used in the classroom. This will allow the acclimation of the organism to its new home or allow subculturing as necessary.
- ◆ Prepare all necessary materials (cultures, cages, etc.) before the arrival of the organisms. Anticipate the organism’s needs so that it will be treated humanely upon arrival.

Discussion and Notes

Animals should only be kept in the classroom to facilitate learning. In the case of younger students, it is probably best to remove animals from the classroom before students lose interest in them.

- ◆ Open shipments of live materials immediately and follow all directions for their care. Alert school receptionists and/or receiving staff about the imminent arrival of any live specimens.
- ◆ All animals must be provided with appropriate food, space, cleanliness, water, shelter, and day-to-day care.
- ◆ Involve students in the care and maintenance of the organisms. Avoid activities that are beyond the developmental level of students.
- ◆ Occasionally, a student might have an allergic reaction to a certain kind of animal or dust from an animal enclosure. If so, the student and animal should not be forced into proximity of each other.
- ◆ Do not allow imported exotic animals, wild animals, injured or stray animals, or known poisonous animals in your classroom. Bringing pets such as cats, dogs, etc. can quickly become a disaster for a variety of reasons and should be strongly discouraged.
- ◆ Students should always wash their hands before and after feeding, handling or cleaning animals.
- ◆ Stay alert to changes in an animal's behaviour or eating habits and seek professional help if necessary.
- ◆ Some organisms bite, sting, or carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans. While these facts may not preclude keeping such animals, it does mean that all appropriate and sensible precautions must be taken. Gloves, cages, and other species-specific materials should be available.
- ◆ Not all students may share the same enthusiasm for animals. Be sensitive to feelings of fear or dislike, and also to phobias about certain animals (snakes, spiders, etc.).

Transfer, Disposition or Fate of Animals

Plan in advance for the eventual transfer, disposition or fate of an organism. Instructors should also plan for the care and feeding of animals during school breaks. Animals that are not native to your area or animals that have been purchased (even if they are thought to be native to your area) should not be released into the wild. They may suffer and die or they may become established and cause ecological damage.

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