

## **What's the Problem With Classroom 'Pets'?**

From PETA – People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

<http://www.peta.org/teachkind/humane-classroom/whats-problem-classroom-pets/>

Many teachers consider bringing animals into their classrooms as a way to teach students about responsibility, pet care, animal science, and more. We know that many teachers who keep classroom “pets” do so with good intentions, but the classroom simply isn't a suitable home for an animal. There are many issues that come along with having class “pets,” so we hope that you'll keep the following in mind before choosing to keep an animal in your school.

Here are six reasons to say NO to getting a classroom “pet”:

**It supports breeders and the cruel pet trade.** Many small animals used as class “pets” come from awful breeding facilities where they're kept in horrific and filthy conditions, deprived of proper veterinary care, and left vulnerable to abuse. Breeders also directly contribute to the severe overpopulation crisis and destroy shelter animals' chances of finding good homes.

**It's unnatural.** When sensitive animals are confined to a small cage or tank in a classroom, their needs and natural instincts are almost always ignored. For example, mice and other small mammals are nocturnal, yet they're regularly kept in brightly lit classrooms and removed from their cages throughout the day. Imagine how stressful it must be for an animal to be frequently handled by children who have no experience doing so.

**They're left alone and left behind.** Class “pets” are vulnerable to illness and neglect, as they're regularly left unmonitored at night and on the weekends without care or interaction. During school breaks, it's a scramble to find students who can take the animals home. More often than not, if a student does volunteer, their homes aren't screened and they and their families are unprepared for the comprehensive care that small animals require (which can lead to tragic consequences). If no students or teachers can take the animals in, they often end up in already severely crowded shelters.

**It's a health risk.** Keeping animals in the classroom is a huge risk for the animals and for the students. Many kids have allergies, which can be exacerbated by the presence of certain animals. Bacteria such as salmonella can be spread by the handling of reptiles and frogs, and rodents such as hamsters can carry transmittable diseases, too.

**They're at risk of abuse.** Sadly, some classroom “pets” aren't just suffering because of unintentional neglect. PETA has received many reports of awful cruelty to animals who are kept in schools, including the following incidents:

- A snake was stolen from his classroom enclosure and cooked to death inside a school microwave.
- Two chinchillas were beaten and left for dead.

- A rabbit in a daycare showed symptoms of illness but was never given any veterinary care—and he died without receiving treatment for his condition.
- Four pigs had a caustic chemical poured onto them—resulting in painful burns to their backs, ears, and necks.
- A lamb was stolen from a school’s agriculture building, spray-painted, duct-taped to the outside of a building, and left overnight in freezing temperatures.

There are better ways to teach. Kids can learn responsibility and develop respect for animals in countless ways that don’t put a single animal at risk. Teach responsibility through community service projects and by caring for plants and/or a school garden. Teach children about the life cycle and animal behavior by observing local wildlife, watching high-quality documentaries, or using computer programs. Children should never be misled into thinking that animals are classroom tools—there’s never an excuse to put an animal’s well-being at risk.

### **So What Can You Do?**

- Pledge NEVER to keep animals in your classroom, and share information with your students and staff about why you choose to do so.
- If your school is keeping animals—either as “pets” or as teaching “tools”—voice your disagreement! If you’re comfortable with doing so, write a letter to or have an open conversation with the involved staff members explaining the cruelty inherent in the pet trade and in keeping animals in the classroom, along with the many risks that are involved and the message that keeping animals in the classroom sends to students.
- You can even write a letter to your principal and school board asking them to implement a policy regarding keeping animals in the school. Be sure to include all the pertinent information, and contact us if you need any assistance!
- If you already have an animal in your classroom, please make the compassionate decision either to take the animal home or to find a sanctuary where he or she can live peacefully and with appropriate care.