

## **Should You Have A Pet In Your Classroom?**

There are many reasons for keeping live animals in the classroom. Students of all ages can benefit from being exposed to other forms of life. The primary justification, although not the only one, is that live animals in the classroom teach children responsibility. There are many ways of doing this, but classroom pets are an engaging way to motivate students to take an active role in the class and to realize how important it is to be consistent when taking care of another creature. All too often children and adults alike desire to have pets, but without understanding the commitment level needed and the large responsibility affiliated with pet ownership. Sadly many pets suffer greatly from mismanagement, neglect, and abandonment. Raising pets in the classroom helps students to understand the needs of the animals and how much commitment is truly needed to keep animals comfortable and healthy.

Another justification for keeping and maintaining animals in the classroom is building empathy within students. Empathy gives students the ability to feel what others feel, whether it an animal or a fellow student. Developing this sometimes missing aspect in children may help the issues around bullying. Bullying can spill over into the animal world where people physically harm animals for varying reasons. Building empathy will enhance the desire to be a responsible pet owner and treat animals with respect, understand their needs and meet those needs; hopefully this will spill over into the human world.

A final fundamental justification for the inclusion of animals in the classroom is the limited exposure that students have to live animals. This point is especially true in larger, urban centers. Students from small, rural communities might also have limited exposure to live animals, unless from a farming background. Some students have a "squashing the bug" mentality toward live animals due to this lack of connection. Bringing animals into the classroom can help expose students to the natural world around them and encourage an active and kind participation in it.

In conclusion, there are many therapeutic benefits to associating children and school with pets. I encourage you to read about many of the advantages of classroom pets at the National Pet Week website.

This resource package is not intended to advocate the captivity of wild species, rather to foster a respect for animals through the use of classroom pets.

Excerpted from "Caring for Animals: A Guide to Pets in the Classroom," published by The American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS), 2008.