

1975

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### Recommended Citation

Hoyt, John A. (1975) "Do We Misuse Animals in School Science Projects?," *Iowa Science Teachers Journal*: Vol. 12 : No. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/istj/vol12/iss1/4>

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# DO WE MISUSE ANIMALS IN SCHOOL SCIENCE PROJECTS?

John A. Hoyt

The Humane Society of the United States  
Washington, D.C.

A 17-year-old Iowa girl won a trip to the 1974 International Science and Engineering Fair by grafting skin onto 12 mice in the basement of her home after only talking with a veterinarian. One mouse died, one sloughed off the graft, and the others were killed by the student with an overdose of ether.

A 15-year-old Kentucky boy won a trip to the same fair by trapping three squirrels in a park, confining them to cages in his basement, and giving them electric shocks over a period of several months to learn if they would respond to visual tests.

This is the type of relationship with animals that some school systems in the United States are encouraging. It is a far cry from the "respect for all life" that the Humane Society of the United States would like to see demonstrated and taught to young people in the nation's schools.

The Humane Society of the United States has been crusading for many years to stop science projects and classroom demonstrations that inflict pain, suffering, or injury on any warm-blooded animal. HSUS mounted its most concerted effort, however, in 1973, when it issued *Guiding Principles for the Use of Animals in Elementary and Secondary Education*. These principles prohibit amateur surgery, the induction of cancer, and all other painful procedures on vertebrate animals (such as hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits, and mice). Several thousand copies of these principles have been distributed to school boards, administrators, and teachers throughout the nation. Many school systems and teachers have reported the adoption of all or most of the items contained in the principles.\*

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\* Editor's note: These principles emphasizing appreciation of all life, recommending use of invertebrates for student experiments, calling for supervision of lab animals by qualified adults responsible for ensuring their humane treatment, and close biomedical supervision of experiments involving anesthetics, pathogens, carcinogens, radiation, or surgical procedures are incorporated into the *Handbook of the Iowa Junior Academy of Science*. This provides guidelines for student projects which have recently been ignored, according to Mr. Hoyt.

A significant step toward stopping cruelty to animals in schools was achieved in 1973 when California enacted legislation that bans the anesthetizing, subjection to pain, injury, or inhumane death of vertebrate animals in all public school-sponsored projects. In testimony on the proposed ban, presented at the invitation of the State Assembly Education Committee, HSUS West Coast Regional Director Herbert N. Martin said: "What concerns us, when children who have barely attained the age of reason are encouraged to experiment on living animals, is the *kind of attitude* that is being cultivated. Students may learn from specific classroom experience things that are entirely different from what the teacher had in mind. It is not often realized that the teacher is cultivating attitudes, not teaching biology."

Several years before, in 1968, HSUS member Richard K. Morris, Ph.D., a professor of education at Trinity College, had been instrumental in getting the Connecticut Board of Education to adopt a policy urging all school systems in the state to avoid using animals in any way that could cause pain.

Pressure from humane organizations resulted in 1970 in the Westinghouse Electric Corporation banning the use of animals in projects for the Westinghouse Annual Science Talent Search. Only a year before, Westinghouse had given one of its national awards to a girl who blinded sparrows and starved them to death.

The most recent development was the improvement in projects accepted for competition in the 1974 International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), the final stage of competition for about 90 percent of the state and local science fairs in the nation. HSUS representatives who attended the fair, held at Notre Dame University last May, reported there were no projects involving experiments on monkeys, a popular subject at previous fairs, and a reduction in the number of projects involving home surgery on animals. They also found a greater awareness by student exhibitors that rules did exist governing the humane use of animals.

Yet, in spite of these improvements, F. Barbara Orlans, Ph.D., found "an overwhelming emphasis" on harming vertebrate animals. Out of 35 projects that involved the use of small mammals, 28 involved the infliction of harm or painful death.

Projects involving pain to animals will be eliminated only when the following ISEF regulations and practices are changed:

*Weak rules that explicitly sanction* all surgical procedures, use of anesthetic drugs, ionizing radiation, disease-causing organisms, and

carcinogens. (Furthermore, since *there is no restriction on the infliction of pain*, students often perform experiments involving the induction of cancer, use of chemicals at toxic levels, drugs producing pain or deformity, use of extreme temperatures, and electric shock.) *Lack of enforcement* of the good fair rules urging the use of microscopic animals, worms, and insects instead of vertebrate animals.

"Humanitarians must now focus their efforts on getting science fair officials to do away with these problem areas," said Dr. Orleans, a physiologist with the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Orleans visited the booths of all biological projects at the 1974 International Fair. She discovered that *guidelines for judges* issued by some fairs made no mention of existing animal regulations. As a result, exhibitors were not disqualified nor even penalized for ignoring them.

Nevertheless, some progress has been made. "I do think the dissemination of the forceful HSUS Guiding Principles has had an immense impact," Dr. Orleans said. "We have been able to convince thousands of biology teachers of the importance of the humane treatment of animals."

But, when 28 high school students are rewarded with prizes in a national science fair competition for projects that caused pain to animals, it is clear that humanitarians still have a great deal of educational work ahead of them.

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## GRACIOUS READER, PLEASE! HEED HUMBLE EDITOR'S REQUEST

Confusion says we need certain elusive copies of the *ISTJ* to complete the library at the Science Education Center. Mysterious gaps occur in our collection where these issues should be available for contemplation: December, '64; February, '65; October, '65; February, '67; April, '67; February, '71; and December, '72.

Your attention to this request will merit gratitude from Dr. Robert Yager, Science Education Center, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242.