

Questioning Our Actions Towards Animals:
Animal-Related Ethical Dilemmas for Young People



Learning Another Way: Thinking about Dissection

Tamika could not wait for Monday to come. Her 8th grade science class was beginning its biology unit, which she had been waiting for all year. When she finally walked into class on Monday and Mr. Lamar, her science teacher, began the introduction of biology, Tamika, an animal-lover, was enthralled—until Mr. Lamar reached into his desk and pulled out a container of worms submerged in a liquid which sent a foul odor about the room.

“Class, on Friday we will be completing our first dissection,” he announced. “We’ll partner up, and each pair will receive one earthworm. Let’s take a look at this diagram. For the rest of the week, until Friday, we will be using it to learn more about our specimen...”

That was the last that Tamika heard of Mr. Lamar’s lecture on the anatomy of the worm. So many thoughts were rolling around in her head, making her feel confused and conflicted. A dissection? Who would have thought we’d be doing a dissection this early? Tamika knew one thing for certain. In the word biology, “bio” means life, and to her, killing an animal for experimental purposes just didn’t seem right.

Tamika is torn. She wants to complete the assignment successfully so she can get a good grade, but she knows in her heart that it isn’t something she feels comfortable doing. What should she do?



Tamika’s dilemma is a common one. Biology is important to study, but, especially in primary and secondary schools, much life is wasted on experiments and dissection. Kids don’t need to participate in acts that go against their inner voices. Luckily we live in a time and place where there are different options available for science classes!

The MSPCA believes that elementary and secondary school teachers should utilize the alternative resources obtainable today rather than dissection or other procedures that are invasive and stressful for animals.

Tamika could ask Mr. Lamar for a meeting the next day after she gathers and organizes her thoughts so she can make a good case against dissection. The first thing she might stress with her teacher is how much she loves science and that she has been looking forward to his class for a long time. However, she needs to be honest and tell him that dissection is against her moral beliefs. Then, she might respectfully present the many alternatives available today. The options include great computer programs that are available with outstanding graphics and 3-D imagery; they’re just like real dissection but without the use of a living animal. There are also books, 3-D models, multi-layered posters that detail the different systems of the body, DVDs which can be quite detailed and graphic, and, lastly, simply observing living animals in their natural habitats. Tamika can suggest these options be used for the whole class or, if Mr. Lamar won’t budge in his decision, she can suggest that he only use one

specimen for the whole class, instead of one for every student or pair of students. Hopefully, he will at least allow Tamika and other students who feel similarly to use the alternatives.

Banding with other students opposed to dissection might give more power to changing both Mr. Lamar's mind and the school's policies. If Mr. Lamar isn't open to Tamika's viewpoint, then she might also enlist the help of her parents or another trusted adult or teacher. Many school districts have policies on students' rights with regards to dissection alternatives that do not have negative consequences for the students. Tamika could contact her local animal adoption center, anti-vivisection society (groups against using live animals to gain knowledge), or HSUS for further information and help.