

Teacher’s Pet: Having Animals in the Classroom

It was only the end of Tyrone’s first week of school, but already, he was beginning to settle in to his new schedule, classes, and responsibilities. So, when he walked into his homeroom class on Friday, he organized his things on his desk and sat quietly to wait for the day’s first lesson to begin. However, this was not the case for his classmates. They were still stuck in their old, rambunctious mindset of the previous year. It took five minutes for Miss Cadenza, their teacher, to get them to settle down, and all that ran through Tyrone’s mind was that it was going to be a long year.

Instead of the usual grammar lesson with which they had started each day for the past week, Miss Cadenza began by saying that she had a big announcement to make.

“Class,” she began, “I would like your opinion on something. This is my third year of teaching at this school, and finally I feel settled enough to consider getting a class pet.” As soon as the words came out of her mouth, the class roared! Shouts of “Can I name it?” and “You’re the best, Miss Cadenza!” bounced around the classroom. It took another five minutes for the students to sit back in their seats and be quiet.

“I was thinking of going to the pet store this weekend and picking up a hamster, unless anyone has a pet they would be willing to donate to the class,” their teacher said.

Tyrone sighed. He knew from having a guinea pig that pets are big commitments, and he wasn’t really sure if his classmates could handle it. The constant petting and attention, on top of the uncontrollable noise level, could not be good for a little hamster.

“Any suggestions or questions?” asked Miss Cadenza. Twenty hands went up in the air—all but Tyrone’s. What can he suggest that will improve the life of the classroom pet?



Boy! Tyrone really has his work cut out for him. Not only does he need to convince his teacher to really think through this big commitment, but he also has to get his classmates’ attention without spoiling everyone’s fun. A classroom pet is entitled to the same quality of care as that of a household companion. And, although there is a whole classroom of students ready and willing to care for the pet, it can be more difficult to care for a pet in the classroom than in a home with fewer people. Just like household pets, classroom pets need food and fresh water, grooming, clean bedding, plenty of space, a safe environment, and love. And, in a classroom, organizing everything a pet needs can be difficult.

The MSPCA believes that classroom pets should only be acquired for purposes of educating students about the sensitivity of animals and the need for their responsible and humane care.

To start with, it would be a good idea for Tyrone to jot down some of his thoughts about classroom pets. Then, either before or after school begins the next day, he could approach Ms. Cadenza one-on-one, with all of his information organized and prepared. He might use his experience with pet guardianship as an example of the responsibility that caring for a pet requires. Voicing his concern about the rambunctiousness of his classmates, Tyrone could mention that, especially since hamsters are nocturnal, the animal will definitely need a quiet space to escape from his busy classmates. He might even suggest choosing a diurnal animal, meaning one that sleeps at night.

Tyrone can help Ms. Cadenza come up with a plan as to who will care for the pet overnight and during weekends, vacations, and no-school days. Suggesting a pet from an animal shelter rather than a pet store would make a great deal of sense, since there are always small animals looking for caring homes. Ms. Cadenza may even find an animal already accustomed to a busy environment, which would be a perfect fit! The adoption would also serve as a great example for families looking for a pet in the future. Finally, Tyrone can mention to Ms. Cadenza that he hopes she will teach him and his classmates all about hamsters (or whichever animal she chooses) to give educational value to the classroom pet experience.

If an animal could be cared for in the classroom, with all of his needs met, Tyrone could see the benefits that would result from the relationships between a small animal and the students.