MISMR
Michigan Society for Medical Research

BioFocus

A Newsletter Exploring Science & Biomedical Research Issues For School Educators

Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring 2000

Our Mission

The Michigan Society for Medical Research (MISMR) is a statewide nonprofit educational organization whose mission is to promote understanding of biomedical research and testing that use animal models.

Established in 1981, MISMR is made up of the state's leading research universities, teaching hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, voluntary health organizations, and hundreds of scientists, educators, and students who understand and support the importance of animal research and testing in advancing health care and treatment.

Educational Projects & Activities

ANNUAL ESSAY CONTEST

Each year, MISMR sponsors an essay contest for all Michigan middle and high school students. Students from well over 500 schools in the state have annually participated in the contest to address the benefits of biomedical research.

SPEAKERS BUREAU

MISMR volunteers visit K–12 schools and civic community groups each year to educate the public about biomedical research and to dispel commonly held myths.

ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

MISMR's popular annual meetings have often proved to be "standing room only," typically attracting local and national educators and researchers with interactive training workshops and presentations promoting biomedical research.

HUMANS & ANIMALS ENRICHMENT PROGRAM

Designed for elementary school students, the Humans and Animals Enrichment Program increases awareness for students of the many con-tributions people derive from animals through the use of storytelling, discussion groups, slides, and demonstrations with live animals.

Welcome!

The Michigan Society for Medical Research (MISMR) is proud to bring you *BioFocus,* a newsletter helping middle and high school educators better understand how biomedical research contributes to the many health advances and cures that have made human and animal life more sustainable and enjoyable.

BioFocus will be published three times per school year. Each issue will contain relevant, practical information including updates on biomedical research, frequently asked questions from educators, and highlights of classroom-based activities.

We want this publication to be valuable to you and we solicit your feedback on the premier issue of *BioFocus.* Please contact us with your comments by sending an email to mismr@umich.edu. Enjoy our first issue!

Reptilian Classroom Friends

By Cheryl Hatch

I teach ninth grade biology to talented students in the Kalamazoo area who have declared and demonstrated an interest in mathematics and the sciences. I have also developed a reputation around the school as a lover and nurturer of exotic classroom friends.

Many of my students share this interest in animals. Although some of my students have dogs and cats, many don't have pets at all. Having animals in our classroom gives these students an opportunity to be pet co-owners and approach unusual animals in safe and non-threatening ways. Together, we are learning about these animals that live in the classroom with us, researching and sharing the information we find.

Last school year I had the opportunity to buy some rather large ball pythons from another teacher. The three snakes — Hook, Skinny, and Baby — are very popular with students and a source of interest for many school visitors. We established class rules about the snakes, including identifying who may handle them, and made a pledge to respect the wishes of those students who are not yet ready to make friends with the snakes.

It's fascinating to see who the greatest snake lovers are! Sometimes it's the immaculately groomed cheerleader who approached this project thinking that the snakes would be "icky," and sometimes it's the student who hasn't made any other friends yet. The experiences my students have with the snakes are meaningful, and they provide valuable lessons in respect and gentleness that are not provided anywhere else in the curriculum.

We Want to Hear From You!

We want to include your stories or questions relating to animals in your classroom in upcoming editions of *BioFocus.* Please email stories to mismr@umich.edu. or mail to: MISMR • P.O. Box 3237 • Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3237

MISMR Supports NSTA's Mission

Use of living organisms gives students unique perspectives on life processes that they are not otherwise exposed to in traditional curriculums. By working with animals, students develop skills of observation and comparison, a sense of stewardship, and a greater understanding of the sanctity and complexity of life. Such work, however, requires proper, humane care of organisms. MISMR supports the National Science Teachers Association's guidelines on the use of non-human animals in instructional activities supervised by science teachers at the pre-college level. Such a mission emphasizes consideration for observed organisms through guidelines that address national laws, supervision, safety precautions, and sensitivity to student concerns.

Fast Facts... About Biomedical Research

Humans now live an additional 20.8 years because of the discoveries made from biomedical research. Approximately 90 percent of animals used in research are rats, mice, and other rodents. Dogs and cats, as well as monkey and other non-human primates, represent less than one percent of research animals.

Virtually every major medical advance in this century has been dependent upon animal research.

Pets and farm animals are among the primary beneficiaries of veterinary research using laboratory animals, to which we owe cures for pet cancer and heart diseases.

A number of animal models used in biomedical research are bred specifically for that purpose by USDA licensed suppliers.

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BioFocus is published by the Michigan Society for Medical Research. Please send your questions, comments, and suggestions to:

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Resources

The **National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences** offers two new, colorful publications for middle and high school teens that help students better understand the relationship between "nature vs. nurture" in shaping our health and well-being. *Making it in a Tough Environment: You and Your Gene,* shows young people why some of us are more susceptible to environmental influences than others. The second publication, *Environmental Disease from A to Z,* uses an illustrated approach to the alphabet to explore environmentally-induced illnesses, ranging from asthma to zinc deficiency. For free class copies, visit the NIEHS website at www.niehs.nih.gov.

The website also allows you to order a short preventive health folder for teens and pre-teens titled *It's Your Scene, Teen,* which uses rhyming catch phrases such as "Read the Label, Mabel" to describe 20 environment-related actions teens can take to prevent common hazards.

The **National Institute of Health (NIH) Office of Science and Education** offers standard-based curriculum supplements with CD-ROMs that bring modern medical research findings into the classroom. Three new curriculum supplements are *Cell Biology and Cancer, Emerging and Re-emerging Infectious Diseases,* and *The Human Genetic Variation.* Order free of charge at http://science-education.nih.gov/supplements. Supplies are limited.

The **National Academy of Sciences** has produced a series of articles which tell stories of how basic scientific research can lead to human benefits that could not have been anticipated at the time the research was conducted. The eleven articles written for the series to date are available at www.BeyondDiscovery.org.

You Asked...

Question: *I received a publication saying that animals used in dissection are embalmed in formaldehyde and extremely expensive to buy. Furthermore, it stated that such dissections are causing frogs to disappear from our ecosystems. What should I believe?*

Response: Information provided by people with an agenda that animals should not be used in school or in research can be very misleading. Animals used in dissection are not embalmed in formaldehyde, and the price is not prohibitive. Amphibians used for research purposes are not harvested from the natural environment. Disappearing habitats and disease are challenging the well-being and survival of many species, including amphibians.

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