The 1985 National Humane Education Teacher of the Year

Better Teaching Through Humane Education

—Suzanne and Richard Odell

Kathy focuses on a wide variety of animal topics with her students, including native wildlife. Here, two of Kathy's students display the bird puppets they made and used to put on a humane education puppet show.

Humane education involves far more than the teaching of simple animal-related content. It is a process through which we (1) assist children in developing compassion, a sense of justice, and a respect for all living creatures; (2) provide the knowledge and understanding necessary for children to behave according to these principles; and (3) foster a sense of responsibility on the part of children to affirm and act upon their personal beliefs.

"The guidelines which appear at left are taken from *People & Animals*, our humane education curriculum guide. We think you'll agree that Kathryn [Kathy] Anderson is an excellent example of a teacher committed not only to these goals of humane education, but to the goals of quality and excellence in education as well."

—Patty Finch
NAAHE Director

by Bill DeRosa

Even as a youngster, Kathy Anderson wanted to be a teacher. Recalling her childhood, Kathy notes: "I played school in the basement of our house and started out with my pet Chihuahua as a student."

Since becoming a teacher in 1976, Kathy's enthusiasm for her profession has not diminished. Her love of children brought her to teaching, and it has kept her there. Kathy currently is a second/third grade teacher at Battleground Elementary School in Lincolnton, North Carolina. She is concerned not only with her students' academic progress but also with their physical well-being and emotional growth and development. This, along with her love for animals, has helped lead Kathy to humane education. Kathy believes that instruction does not and cannot take place in a moral vacuum. She has sought to instill in her students only the very highest ideals of which humans are capable. To Kathy, those high ideals are the very essense of humane education and the main reason she includes it in her curriculum.

"An activity on whales, birds, or other animals when blended with a lesson in one of our traditional subjects, especially writing or math, really helps to spark the children's interest in what they are doing," Kathy observes.

Some of the animal topics Kathy covers include zoo animals, farm animals, responsible pet ownership, whales and dolphins, birds, and dinosaurs.

Kathy's efforts in humane education do not stop at helping youngsters learn and develop their capacities for critical thinking. She also believes that young people should be encouraged to translate their knowledge and beliefs into positive behavior toward animals consistent with their own value systems. Consequently, many of Kathy's humane education activities are intended to enable students to affirm and act upon their personal beliefs.

In one such activity, Kathy's class took part in a letter-writing campaign designed to develop writing skills. Students responded enthusiastically when given the opportunity to write letters on helping to save whales and dolphins. Many of the children wrote to leaders of the Soviet Union and Japan asking for a moratorium on killing whales. In addition, many students also wrote to three major tuna manufacturers, urging them to develop new ways to catch tuna without killing dolphins. The class received several responses from the companies describing "dolphin-safe" fishing methods currently under consideration. Since completion of the unit, Kathy has noticed some of her students voluntarily bypassing tuna sald when it has been served in the school cafeteria, while others choose not to do so. It is rewarding to Kathy to see her students making informed choices, with consideration of humane ethics as an important part of the process, regardless of what actions they ultimately decide are appropriate and meaningful for them.

"An activity on . . . animals . . . really helps to spark the children's interest . . . . "

Another experience that gave students the opportunity to explore options was a schoolwide vegetarian day that Kathy sponsored. She arranged for the school cafeteria to serve a vegetarian entree in addition to the regular menu. Participation in the meatless day was strictly voluntary. For the younger students, it was a chance to "stop and think about where much of their food actually comes from" and to experience a new entree. For older students, it was an opportunity to learn more about what prompts some people to become vegetarians. Kathy states: "I was able to explain to students that most farm animals do not live in idyllic 'Old McDonald' kinds of settings. Most children still have this conception of farm animals." Kathy was able to expose students to facts about farming and alternative diets without painting farmers as "bad guys" or condemning regular cafeteria fare.

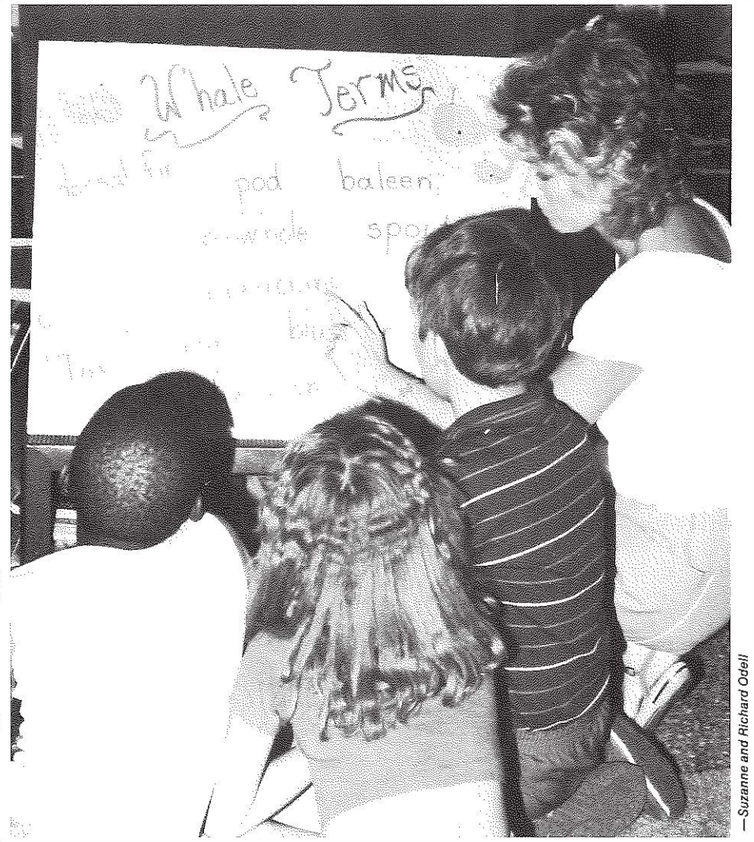
Back to Basics

While such special humane education units are rewarding and educationally enhancing for students, Kathy, like most educators, finds most of her class time devoted to traditional subjects. Kathy uses her creativity to blend humane education into these subjects.

One math activity that Kathy's class always greets with enthusiasm is designed to teach measuring skills...with an animal focus! In this outdoor lesson, the class stretches a 100-foot measuring tape across the school playground. Students place pictures of various species of whales and dolphins along the tape measure at lengths that correspond to the actual sizes of the particular animals. The activity allows children to develop their measuring skills and lays foundation for future discussions about humane issues.

Kathy serves on her local Board of the North Carolina Association of Educators. She also served as chairwoman of the 1984–85 American Education Week in her county. Despite her busy schedule, Kathy finds time to be a member of numerous animal welfare organizations and to teach Sunday school classes at her church. Here, too, she regularly incorporates humane education into her teaching activities.

NAAHE is proud to introduce its members to Kathy Anderson and to have her as our 1985 Humane Education Teacher of the Year. ♡



—Suzanne and Richard Odell

Vocabulary enrichment for Kathy's students includes learning words related to preserving one of their favorite endangered species—the whale.