Free for the Asking...

By John J. Dommers, Director, Norma Terris Humane Education Center, East Haddam, Connecticut

Whether you teach in the city or the suburbs there's an outdoor classroom on or near your school site. Maybe you use it, maybe you don't. In any case, think about this. An outdoor classroom can supplement and stimulate your nature education or animal study program. It is a place for creative learning and experiences unlimited. A natural area, school courtyard, or nearby park can give depth, meaning and new dimension to generalizations which are too often a part of indoor nature studies.

If you've been under the impression that you have to be "A Walking Encyclopedia" of nature facts to use an outdoor classroom, forget it! There's a wealth of talent in your community to help you out and work with you. And it's free for the asking.

The Soil Conservation Service, Extension Service and Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture are among the federal agencies that can assist in developing outdoor classrooms. These agencies have either regional, state, or local offices. Telephone directories list these offices under "United States Government."

Each of the above listed agencies will send a resource person at no charge to assist you in planning and using an outdoor classroom. They will also supply excellent publications and teaching guides for nature investigation activities.

Also, don't forget to tap these sources for on site assistance:

1. Garden Clubs
2. High School and College Environmental Studies Classes
3. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts

To start the ball rolling, take a minute today to call the Soil Conservation Service and ask for their illustrated publication "Outdoor Classrooms on School Sites." It's free for the asking, too.
DON'T BUY EASTER PETS!

Easter is a time for joy,
It's fun for every girl and boy.

But lots of chicks and ducks and rabbits,
Have to change their natural habits.

People color these baby creatures,
Changing all their natural features.

At first they're fun to have and hold,
But soon they're growing big and old.

Caring and feeding is a chore,
That some folks find can be a bore.

So they die and pass away,
A senseless death — so we say —

So don't buy Easter pets this year,
Remember — every life is dear!
A Long Time Ago There Were Two Animals, Pg. 2

FOLLOW-UP: If there is a 7-Eleven store in your area, we suggest that you ask the students to visit it and ask the manager how the program is being received. Are people discussing the cups with him? Do people come in and ask for certain cups?

FOLLOW-UP: This picture story could serve as a stimulus for creative writing activities. For example, you could ask your students to put themselves in the place of the wolf or the dog. Then, have them relate the experiences of their daily lives. Perhaps some might wish to write about one exciting experience they have had as a wolf or a dog.

Endangered Animals Can be Saved, Pages 1 & 2

SKILLS: Since this lead story deals with animal problems in Australia, there are several “down under” nouns that should be reviewed with the students. They are: koala bear, eucalyptus tree, camphor oil, kangaroos, outback, and marsupials. Ask the students if they know of any American marsupials. (The opossum is the only American marsupial. It carries its young in a fur-lined pouch.)

ATTITUDES: Ask: Do you think there are any American animals that have been over-hunted for their skins? (Beaver, Black Bear, Badger, Fisher) Do you think there is any reason today to hunt animals only for their skins? (The fake fur manufacturers have been able to duplicate and improve upon nature’s ability to produce beautiful skins and furs. Thus, there is no reason why animals should be hunted for their skins. This may have been a necessary evil during the early development of our nation because of the lack of the technology that we have today. In addition, the ordinary citizen hunted for food first and utilized the skin and fur of an animal because he understood that he must make the best use of everything and not waste a thing.)

ATTITUDES: Ask: Why should we care what happens to animals in Australia? It can’t possibly affect the “balance of nature” here in the U.S.A. (The listing of the kangaroos reflects the humane concern that Americans have for living things no matter where they are. This has often been reflected in times of natural disaster when the U.S. is the first nation to send aid to hungry and injured people). What can be done to meet the needs and desires of people and yet still maintain wilderness areas for animals such as the grizzly? Placing these magnificent beasts on the threatened list is one step that can help, but what is the answer to the people vs. animal confrontation over the long haul? Will the 21st century be a time when large creatures such as grizzlies and kangaroos are absent from the face of the earth? (Naturally, these questions have no answer as yet. However, if young people begin to ponder the realities of man’s continuing pressure on wildlife, perhaps an answer can be found.)
Note — We are breaking with our usual practice of providing tips for the other articles in the newsletter to provide you with long term projects that you and your students might find enjoyable and rewarding learning experiences. — ED

Water is Necessary for All Living Things
We all know that every plant and every animal needs water in order to live, but we really never get down to finding out how much water. Obviously, the place to begin is with the students themselves. If you follow through on the following activities, your students should develop a good understanding of the amounts of water they consume, excluding that which is used for bathing, processing foods, in various manufacturing establishments, and so on. In this long term activity, we will be dealing with just the water that your students consume in order to function.

- Ask the students to bring in can labels, labels from jars, labels from frozen foods, and other labels that list the contents of the containers that have been used for food that they consume in their homes. Display these labels and mark the water content so that all might find it easily. Discuss the amounts of water that one student may take in from several of the foods.
- Ask 6 volunteers to bring some food that they enjoy eating to school. One portion should be satisfactory. Weigh the portion while it is still “fresh” and then weigh it again when it has dried out. Determine what part or percentage of the food is water.
- Following the previous activities, have the students develop a daily menu from the foods and labels studied. Then have them compute their own daily water intakes. Don’t forget the water fountain in your school. Perhaps an average amount of water consumed by your class could be computed by timing several students and developing an average. Then one of the students could collect water from the fountain for the average time.

Make a Food Chain Web
You can help your students understand the importance of the various food chains by discussing them, but there’s nothing quite like the impact you can make on them with a personal experience. For this project you will need two balls of string, each of a different color, and identification tags for your students. Plain 3X5 cards attached to clothing with safety pins will do. Each student should be identified as a type of plant, a plant-eating animal, a carnivorous animal, an omnivorous animal, or some other life form of the environment. You may assign one student to be a forest, and one student must be the sun, and another water, and another oxygen, and another carbon dioxide. The name of the game is to connect a piece of string from each object to all the other objects it depends upon for its food. For example, trees and living plants depend on the sun for photosynthesis. While they take in oxygen, and so must be connected to that student, they also give off oxygen, so must, in turn, be connected to the student representing oxygen. Since the object of this activity is to show basic food chains, you’ll want to concentrate on this area. Plants depend on the sun for the method they have of making food. But they also depend on the soil for nutrients to make food. They become food, in turn, when a cow or other herbivore comes along so you must connect a string from the plant to the herbivore. Another string should show the link between the cow and water, which is essential to its survival. Then an omnivore eats the berries from one of the plants. Connect that string. The herbivore is eaten by a carnivore, so that connection must be made.

Now select one of the more important members of your food chain web, such as water, or the sun. Have that student drop all the strings he or she is holding, to demonstrate how one link in a food chain can affect so many life forms once it has been broken.

You can take the activity another step when you introduce the second ball of string. This represents the indirect dependency that one life form has on another. You can keep going as long as the interest level is high and your students keep learning.

Animal Life in A City
This project to encourage keen observation will also result in new knowledge and appreciation for small animals that manage, in spite of asphalt and concrete, to survive in a city. Have your students examine an interface where concrete or asphalt and a building meet. Because this is where moisture gathers, it often attracts insects and small animals. With time there often appears a crack or separation at the edge of the building, providing access to the surface for burrowing insects, worms, and others. Dirt tends to accumulate here, too, as it is less protected from wind or water cleansing. You may attract ants with a few crumbs of bread, and watch how they respond and carry off the food.

A bare asphalt or concrete school yard can also serve well to measure free-falling pollutants in the air. Set out pans of water and measure the pollutants they collect over varying periods of time. An even better collector is a pane of glass coated with petroleum jelly. Pollutants can best be measured from these collectors by pressing a clean tissue paper down on the glass. The pollutants will come off onto the tissue.

Make good use of the bare asphalt and concrete areas for other observations, too. Set out materials that provide shelter for insects and small animals, in various locations. You will discover a shady area attracts them best. Document the types of life found at each location each day.

Make a study of the grasses and weeds that somehow manage to poke their way through the hard surfaces of concrete and asphalt. Determine what hardy species are more successful than others. Explore how seeds of these plants came to be in the city. This will call to attention the bird population. Some plant seeds depend on birds and the fertilizer that drops with the seed, in fact, for propagation. Pigeons, starlings, grackles, English sparrows, and others are common in most cities. Explore the ways these species have adapted and others have not. It might be interesting at this time of the year to discover the most unusual place for a bird nest — one which seems most incongruous to a wild animal that we would expect to appreciate. And quiet.
NEW FULL COLOR POSTERS — $1 each or all six for $5. Please order by number.

1 — “Wild And Free” — 18 x 24
2 — “Nothing Bugs Me” — 16 x 21
3 — “Let’s Be Friends” — 18 x 24
4 — “A Friend Is Someone To Lean On” — 18 x 24
5 — “A New Day” — 16 x 20
6 — “Hidden Beauty” — 18 x 24

-TALK IT OVER-

The DON'T BUY EASTER PETS poster and poem has been designed to display in your class. After reading the poem, we suggest that you hold a group discussion dealing with the main ideas in the poem and illustration. The key reason why KIND seeks to stop the sale of Easter pets as toys is the needless deaths that always result. The colored chicks, ducks, and rabbits look cute in the window of the pet shop but the attraction fades fast as the color begins to wear off and the baby animal begins to grow. Too many people who buy Easter pets are really unprepared to care for them. They have little or no knowledge about the proper care and feeding and frequently there is no provision made for housing the creatures.

At present we know of only 18 states that have laws prohibiting the sale of baby chicks, ducks, and rabbits as Easter toys. If your students find the subject of deep interest, you may wish to write to your state capitol requesting copies of the animal cruelty statutes. These statutes are usually worded so that even primary youngsters may understand them.

You may also wish to invite a member of a local humane society to your class to discuss the local problems caused by the sale of Easter pets as toys.

This is a project that can be geared up and developed every year about 1 month before Easter. Interested students may wish to visit local pet shops and talk to the owners about the problems associated with Easter pets. Posters can be made for display in shopping centers.