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SCHOOLHOUSE SQUARE 5099 RIVER ROAD N, KEIZER

The diverse, scaly and sometimes damp world of classroom critters

BY LAURA MURPHY
Of No Adults Allowed

There has been much debate about a pet's place in the classroom. Some teachers feel that they are distracting and disrupt the classroom while other teachers believe they are helpful visual aids and a valuable teaching tool.

Mandy Elder, a biology teacher at McNary High School, has not one, but five pets in her classroom. She has two leopard geckos, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson. They eat mealworms and crickets. "When I first got them they were little kamikazes," Elder said, "whenever we would hold them they would climb up and then jump off."

Elder also has two axolotls, Falcore and Toothless, "I call them that because they remind me of little dragons," Elder said. Axolotls are a type of salamander that lives in the water. Like the rest of her animals, axolotls are carnivorous. "If I put anything else in the tank with them, they'll eat it," she said, "I had a huge tiger snail in there to try and clean up some of the algae and they ate it."

In addition to her tiny predators she also has a ball

python. "Artemis was the goddess of hunting, animals and the night," she said, "when I watch her eat, she's just such an amazing predator." Which is how she landed on the name Artemis for her snake.

Elder uses the animals to teach her students about the food cycle, evolution, and invasive species. "If I was an English teacher or a history teacher I wouldn't have them," she said. Although sometimes in class her animals can draw the students attention, she said they weren't too distracting overall, "They'll just sit and stare at her (Artemis)."

Beyond using animals to help teach the students, Jessica Graham, another biology teacher at McNary, uses them to connect with students, "I don't name them (tree frogs) because then I get attached and they'll die and I'll be sad," she said, "the kids always give me a hard time about never naming them."

Graham has two Pacific tree frogs in her room "I used to have more but with the construction starting next year I've had to downsize," Graham said. "Mrs. Bailon brought them in from her sister's pond or something and we raised them from tadpoles."

Graham thinks classroom pets are important for

engaging students "It gives students a sense of wonder and curiosity," she said. "Whenever a kid is having a bad day, back when I had fish, I'd send them over to the tanks to look at them and calm down. It's sorta like how doctors have fish in their waiting rooms."

critters
in the classroom



Sherlock the Gecko. His partner John Watson was feeling shy.



Falcore or Toothless. (Axlotls are hard to tell apart.)

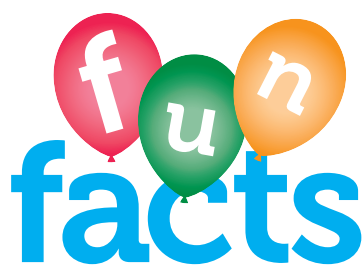


McNary teacher Mandy Elder with ball python Artemis



A Pacific tree frog. Teacher Jessica Graham doesn't like to name them because they don't live as long as some of the other classroom pets.

- Cows chose companions we would consider best friends.
- Classroom pets can be used to teach about a variety of subjects.
- Frogs can freeze without dying.
- A group of ferrets is called a business.
- Dogs have more taste buds than cats.
- Axolotls can regrow their limbs, skin, jaw, tails and spines.
- A giant ant eater's tongue can be up to two-feet long
- Octopi have three hearts.
- Tortoises in hotter environments are lighter than tortoises in colder ones.
- Gentoo penguins use pebbles to propose mating.
- Ostriches can run faster than horses, and the males can roar like lions.
- A single elephant tooth can weigh as much as nine pounds.
- At birth, baby kangaroos are only about an inch long – no bigger than a large water bug or a queen bee
- A woodpecker can peck 20 times per second
- Humans share 70 percent of our DNA with a slug and 98.4 percent with chimpanzees.
- 'Jaws' is the most common name for a goldfish.



jokeBOX

What do you call a tiny axolotl?

An axolittle

What is the difference between a cat and a frog?

Cats have nine lives, frogs croak every night

