



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1992 Volume V: Ecosystems: Tools for Science and Math Teachers

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## Classroom Critters

Guide for Curriculum Unit 92.05.02  
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The main objective of “Classroom Critters” is to make science readily accessible to busy primary teachers who have limited knowledge of science. It is designed to be a guide to successful care of plants and animals in the classroom. In addition to their learning value, I believe plants and animals make an important aesthetic contribution to the classroom environment. They will provide the focus for developing a sense of nurturing in the students as they gradually assume responsibility for their care. As many students come from homes where they experience little nurturing themselves, I hope to stimulate those feelings in the children. By observing, doing and concluding, the students will learn how plants grow, how some animals live and about the interdependency of plants and animals.

The unit objectives will be met by developing three ecosystems: an aquarium, a terrarium, and a vivarium (a terrarium with animals). I feel the care and responsibility for large animals such as rabbits and Guinea pigs would be both limiting and overwhelming. Microcosms— self-contained communities—provide more opportunities for learning.

Teachers who use this unit are invited to be creative in developing an aquarium with tropical fish, a terrarium with a desert climate, and a vivarium with a bog with newts and African frogs. I have written the unit to be easy to follow the steps in developing these ecosystems, but there is great latitude for creative expression.

Science encompasses virtually every aspect of our lives. Using this unit as a start, the stage would be set to explore broader environmental issues such as endangered animals, Biosphere II, or of great importance, how individuals can make a difference in preserving ecology.

New Haven has a wealth of resources with programs in science for our city’s children. The unit includes information about these resources and several books written for the K-2 level full of great ideas for science activities. Also included are lesson plans and an extensive list of recommended reading for students.

(Recommended for Science, Art, and Language Arts, grades K-2)

### **Key Words**

*Ecosystems Ecology Environmental Science Aquariums Terrariums*

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