



When I began my junior year at a new school in Virginia, I was excited to see that they offered an anatomy class. I'm interested in the field of forensics, so I immediately signed up for the course. It was the only class I was looking forward to! Then, in the first week, my enthusiasm was crushed by some horrifying news; the teacher expected the students to dissect cats as part of our human anatomy studies.

We were told "If you have a black cat at home, select a white cat to dissect or vice versa." I was appalled. Like the color of the cat's fur matters to me, when I will be forced to skin a cat and cut him/her to pieces.

I went home and shared the news with my mother, chained-dog activist and founder of Dogs Deserve Better, Tamira Thayne. She didn't even believe me at first, as she'd never heard of it. We spent many hours that week discussing our options both for me and for a way to put an end to cat dissection in my school district and across America. We believed most Americans aren't aware of it, and we couldn't help but think if there was a way to reach these people, cat dissection could end in all but vet training and technician programs.

According to animalearn.org, Virginia is one of 18 states that "... give students from K-12 the option to use alternatives rather than dissect an animal ..." in the classroom. However, an alternative wasn't

enough for us: we wanted cats OFF the menu.

My mother e-mailed the teacher with her concerns, but failed to receive a response. At that point I decided to homeschool in protest of the school's policy of cat dissection and their decision to ignore the concerns of the students.

One student homeschooling wasn't enough—that one student's protest needed to turn into awareness for the masses. My mother and I decided to put up a petition to publicize the cat dissection occurring in Culpeper High School. We asked people to sign it to let the school officials in Virginia—and hopefully nationwide—know that we weren't the only ones opposed to dissecting our companion animals in the classroom.

In our research about cat dissection, we discovered some pretty gruesome facts. Most cats used in dissection come from biological supply companies (Balcombe 31), who obtain them either through “bunchers” illegally collecting cats, or from animal shelters, which make money from the killing of cats, thereby eliminating the incentive to stop the overpopulation problem. (Oakley 6)

There are also health concerns, especially for children, because the cats are often preserved with formaldehyde, a colorless and highly irritating gas with a pungent odor. According to animalearn.org:

“Formaldehyde is a probable human carcinogen. According to literature obtained from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, this chemical preservative can be linked to cancer of the throat, lungs, and nasal passages. Those exposed to formaldehyde risk damage to the eyes, skin irritation, bronchitis, and asthma attacks.” (Dissection)

Additionally, the psychological effects of dissection of companion animals in the classroom cannot be ignored. Many students object on moral or ethical grounds, and being forced into a situation where they must stand against their peers causes them stress and mental anguish. Not only that, but the very act of cutting and mutilating an animal carcass shows a disregard and callousness toward animal life. (Oakley 6)

We put up our petition in early December, 2015, and by early January we had garnered over 100,000 signatures. The signatures were not only from the local area, or even every state in the country but from all over the world! Each signature sends an email to Culpeper County School Officials which means they've gotten the message over 100,000 times. Within a week, we had a TV station asking for an interview, as well as the local newspaper.

I was interviewed for over an hour by Channel 29, an NBC affiliate in Charlottesville, VA. The interview resulted in a two minute segment that aired twice in the regional viewing area, and is still available online at nbc29.com. I also did a newspaper interview with the Culpeper Star Exponent, which was printed in newspapers in Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Roanoke too. Overall, the story of our petition and our efforts to end cat dissection in the Culpeper County Virginia School District was carried in 12 different online news outlets, in addition to TV and hardcopy newspapers.

School official Rob Hauman, executive director of curriculum for Culpeper County Schools said, "The recent attention to this issue of dissection may impact discussions within our school division, the region, and perhaps across the state." (Culpeper)

In the end, one student's distress over a school mandate that borders on cruelty to both students and cats has spread to millions of people reading about the ongoing issue of cat dissection in the classroom. Our petition currently has over 108,000 signatures, and I will continue to raise awareness for the suffering of our companion animals and the students who are forced to cut them open or appear as cowards for not doing so. I remain hopeful that our efforts have made a difference on their behalf.

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Relevant Links

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<http://www.nbc29.com/story/30949320/mother-protesting-dissections-of-cats-at-culpeper-public-schools>

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CULPEPER STAR EXPONENT

Signpost: Local

* Low: 33* Forecast: AA

actress to make 'Mercy Street'

to star as Emma Green in the War drama on Sunday evening

CLAMPSON

on PBS. Set in Alexandria, the Civil War drama was filmed in Richmond and Petersburg and stars Josh Radnor and Mary Elizabeth Winstead. James, born Hannah West

Neill in her family home near Locust Dale, plays the historical figure Emma Green, a privileged Southern belle turned volunteer nurse at the Mansion House Hospital, established by the Union in her family's luxury hotel.

Green was also the sweetheart of Confederate scout Frank Stringfellow, of Culpeper County.

"Few love stories are more exciting or compelling than that of Emma Green and Frank Stringfellow," said "Marching Through Culpeper" author Virginia Morton. "They would not let the war keep them apart."

Morton recently set up a Facebook page, "Remembering Confederate Scout Frank Stringfellow."

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ADVISORS

CULPEPER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Brynna Grimes, 16, holds one of her cats, Charlie, outside her Astoria home. Brynna and her mother, Emma Thayne, started an online petition to urge Culpeper County Public Schools to stop dissecting cats in science classes.

Petitioning to make a change

Local mother, daughter protest cat dissection in science classes

BY RHONDA SIMMONS

Sixteen-year-old high school junior Brynna Grimes was appalled when she learned last August that she'd have to skin and dissect a cat during her anatomy class at Culpeper County High School.

"I never imagined ever having to face the choice to dissect something that I view as my child," Brynna explained to the Star-Exponent during Wednesday's telephone interview. "And something that would mean so much to me. It just blew me away. I was so surprised."

Just a few weeks into the school year, Brynna's mother Tamara Thayne, of Astoria, said she emailed her daughter's teacher, asking why the high school in-

structed the students to dissect cats.

"I told her that I didn't agree with it and she never responded to me so that's when we decided to do a petition because basically we felt that our concerns were ignored," said Thayne, who withdrew her daughter from CCHS at the beginning of the school year. "Cats are companion animals and the thought of doing that to them is horrifying. I can't get over the fact that they do this and are very blasé about it."

In December, Thayne started an online petition "Don't force our children to skin cats" on the Change.org website.

As of Thursday, Thayne collected more than 103,000 signatures toward her 150,000

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Boys basketball: Madison County tops rival William Monroe

INFORMING MORE THAN 40,000 READERS IN PRINT AND ONLINE

CULPEPER STAR EXPONENTIAL

Exponent.com

Low: 33° Forecast: A4

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CHAMPION

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Set in Alexandria, the Civil War
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Nicoll in her family home near
Locust Dale, plays the historical
figure Emma Green, a privileged
Southern belle turned volunteer
nurse at the Mansion House Hos-
pital, established by the Union in
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Green was also the sweetheart of
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Brynnan Grimes, 16, holds one of her cats, Charlie, outside her Amissville home. Brynnan and her mother, Tamira Thayne, started an online petition to urge Culpeper County Public Schools to stop dissecting cats in science classes.

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structed the students to dissect cats.

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See **GRIMES**, Page A6

Grimes

From Page A1

goal.

Before Culpeper, Brynнан attended Altoona Area High School in Pennsylvania. These days, she takes online classes in addition to her mother home-schooling her.

The animal-loving family has five cats.

Reached by email on Wednesday, Rob Hauman, executive director of curriculum and instruction for Culpeper County Public Schools, wrote that the school division's high school level science courses have used "laboratory specimens for dissection" for many years.

"Recent inquiries related to the honors human anatomy and physiology courses have focused mainly on the use of cats for dissection as part of the lab experience," Hauman said. "Culpeper schools have used cats for these labs for at least 10 to 12 years without documented complaints from students or parents. The practice in these elective courses is to follow the guidance provided by the Virginia Department of Education, which requires the use of alternatives for students who do not wish to participate."

Hauman added that classroom materials and resources in Culpeper are evaluated annually.

"The recent attention to this issue of dissection may impact discussions within our school division,



CONTRIBUTED

Brynнан Grimes (left) and her mother Tamira Thayne made a Change.org petition to stop Culpeper County public from dissecting cats in science classes. So far, they have managed to get 103,000 signatures toward their 150,000 goal.

the region and perhaps across the state. Culpeper schools will continue to offer alternatives to dissection and follow guidance from VDOE," Hauman concluded.

Cat dissection is quite common in other area public school divisions, including Fauquier County and Loudoun County public schools. All school systems provide alternatives for students who chose not to participate in the activity.

Laura Byram, administrative assistant to the Orange County Public Schools superintendent, said while Orange County High School science teachers don't dissect cats, they do primarily dissect chickens, sheep parts, squid and crayfish in their biology and anatomy and physiology classrooms.

"These specimens are food grade and purchased primarily from grocery stores and are a by-product

of the food production process. We also use virtual dissections," Byram explained.

Liz Patterson, executive assistant to the Madison County Public Schools superintendent, said Madison County High School does not use cats for any dissections.

Asked where CCPS acquires its cats for dissection, Hauman said the school division purchases them from Carolina Biological Supply and Bio Corporation of Minnesota.

Based in Burlington, North Carolina, Carolina Biological Supply's website says it gets euthanized cats from animal shelters, which would otherwise "be destined for the landfill where we wouldn't be able to utilize them for science classrooms."

The VDOE's definition of dissection "involves the manipulation of properly preserved animals or animal parts for scientific

study, which includes incising and may be followed by inspecting, touching and handling."

According to state school officials, dissection specimens across Virginia range from sheep hearts to fetal pigs, chicken wings, cow eyes and rats.

Also questioned whether CCPS students are assigned to skin a cat, Hauman answered yes.

"Some years they may skin the cat to view the epithelial tissue and associated structures. Other years they may not and only focus on the cardiovascular, digestive, urinary, respiratory and reproductive structures," Hauman explained.

So what happens when Thayne and Grimes reach their online goal of 150,000 signatures?

Change.org spokesman Max Burns said Thursday that sometimes an online petition can spark a discussion in a community and/or it can invite the petitioner's target to respond to their concerns.

"People start petitions for a wide variety of reasons, but the common thread is that they're looking for a place to make their voice heard on an issue that matters to them. People turn to Change.org because of its effectiveness as a means of empowering individuals and bringing concerns (local, national, even international) to the attention of those with the power to make a change."

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Mother Protesting Dissections of Cats at Culpeper Public Schools

Posted: Jan 12, 2016 5:52 PM EST
Updated: Jan 12, 2016 08:03 PM

CULPEPER, Va. (WVIR) - A central Virginia mother and daughter are challenging their county's school system over an assignment in human anatomy class. The project involved slicing open one of the most common house pets, a cat.

Brynnan Grimes, an 11th-grade student, sketches and writes stories about cats in her spare time, which are her favorite creatures.

"She's a Siamese with spotted points," said Grimes.



Grimes has a very strong affection for cats, to put it mildly. The family has five cats including Grimes' personal cat named Sparta.

"I never want children, so these cats are my children," said Grimes.

Grimes is growing closer to her companion animals because the 16-year-old is now being home-schooled after coming home one day from class with a message to her mother.

"She came home and she said 'mom we're supposed to dissect cats in anatomy class' and I was just blown away," said Tamira Thayne, Grimes' mother.

Grimes says she couldn't believe what she heard from her teacher before the dissection. "She said 'if you have a black cat just pick a white cat to dissect,' I was like that doesn't change anything, they're still a cat."



Brynnan Grimes

Rob Hauman, the executive director of curriculum & instruction for Culpeper County Public Schools, issued the following statement:

"Our Honors Human Anatomy and Physiology course does involve animal dissection, including the dissection of cats purchased from a scientific materials vendor. This part of the lab experience has been taking place for many years and, to our knowledge, without complaint from students or parents. Our Veterinary Science course has also used cats in the past.

The course in question is an elective course. The teacher's opening letter/course syllabus explains that dissections will take place and that, per VDOE guidelines, alternatives for students who do not wish to participate, shall be provided. This is an elective class that students take by choice and, if they choose not to participate any dissection, we provide an alternative as required by the guidelines"

The school system says it follows these state guidelines for alternatives to animal dissection. The guidelines require the school notify students of alternatives and provide specific activities or resources as an alternative.

"Even if they technically give them a choice, I believe the student still has to take a stand against the other students...be seen as odd, be seen as a coward...you know the one that doesn't want to do it, said Thayne.

"This really engenders a lack of respect for companion animals, and that's the complete opposite of what we should be telling our students," Thayne added.

Thayne now wants her outrage channeled into action, she posted a petition at [change.org](#). Grimes says she is glad that other animal lovers are joining her in the cause. Click [here](#) to view Tamira Thayne's [change.org](#) petition.

We reached out and checked with several other school systems in central Virginia about what animals they use for dissections. Albemarle and Charlottesville schools also use cats as an option with other animals for students to dissect. Fluvanna County schools do not use cats or any companion animals.

For more information on the Virginia Board of Education Guidelines please [click here](#).





