



## *Turtles in the Classroom*

### **Consider Carefully Before You Start:**

When introducing an animal, such as a turtle, to your classroom, you need to carefully consider the choice you are making.

Turtles need lifetime commitment and specialized care. Make sure you have a plan for future care, including what will be done with the animal when school is out. Many turtles live a very long time, so make sure you are willing to commit to such a big responsibility.

Before introducing an animal to your classroom, educate and familiarize yourself with local laws and regulations. Some animals, like the diamondback terrapin, are illegal to possess without a permit.

Once you are certain the animal you choose is legal, you will want to research safe and responsible handling practices. It is important that you are knowledgeable about your animal and how to keep it safe and healthy.

### **Creating the Proper Habitat:**

Once you select an animal, you will need to create the proper habitat for the animal.

- You will need adequate space and lighting for the animal. Turtles need plenty of sunlight, or special lamps, to make sure they are able to stay warm and produce enough vitamin D.
- Be sure the animal has a place to hide so that it feels safe.
- The enclosure should be tall enough to prevent your animal from climbing out. It should also be easy to clean.
- Unfiltered water should be emptied and cleaned weekly, or more frequently if there is uneaten food or feces. Always be sure that when cleaning supplies are being used, the animal is removed from the room or covered properly.

### **Handling Turtles:**

When handling turtles, you want to make sure you gently support its body and not strain its shell. Always wear gloves or wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after handling because reptiles can carry Salmonella.

Never release a turtle back into the wild, especially in an area that the turtle is not native and could become an invasive species. They will not likely survive and may carry diseases or bacteria that could be harmful to other animals.

### **NSTA Position:**

For more information, please refer to the National Science Teachers Association's position on the Responsible Use of Live Animals in the science classroom:

<http://www.nsta.org/about/positions/animals.aspx>