

Green Iguana Invades West Hartford School

AJ Gutman

The pictures on the following pages are of Osiris, the green iguana adopted by the students of Ms. Joyce St. Germaine's Grade 7 Morning Meeting group at King Philip Middle School in West Hartford, Connecticut.

Osiris had spent the first eight or nine years of his life languishing, like all too many "Iggys," in a 55-gallon aquarium with a marginal diet and inadequate lighting. Both calls came in to the Connecticut Iguana Sanctuary at roughly the same time, one from Iggy's owners asking me to find a home for him and the other from Ms. St. Germaine about adopting an iguana for her classroom. Iggy was of "unknown sex" and allegedly fairly calm, although he hadn't been handled much. I thought he'd make a good candidate for the school, but I lost contact with his owners as the school year was coming to a close. Iggy had apparently left home to spend the summer outdoors in the natural sunlight. He was actually in pretty fair physical condition when he reappeared in the fall and his new placement was still available. Between a leftover cage from another adopted iguana, scavenged light fixtures, and proper ultraviolet lights donated by a local pet shop, he was well equipped to start school.

The habitat had all been set up and the students had diet and care sheets, iguana books, and back issues of the *Iguana Times* in hand before Iggy even arrived. The students were tremendously excited but listened intently when I came in to explain the basics of green iguana care with the iguana perched on my shoulder. Shyly at first, and then with increasing assurance, the students approached to touch him and ask their questions. Beyond providing proper care for their new "classmate," I asked that the kids give him a new name. The next day, when I returned with my Cuban iguana to give a talk about conservation, the board in the classroom was covered with potential names. We had a bit of a close call with "Fluffy," but "Osiris," after the Egyptian God of the Underworld, received the most votes.

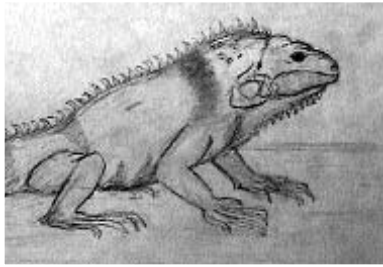
In the following weeks, I was pleased with the progress reports I received on Osiris. The students

would apparently come into the classroom in the morning, prepare Osiris' food and water and tidy his habitat even before the teacher arrived. He became quite the conversation piece, attracting students from all over the school, even if they weren't in any of Ms. St. Germaine's art classes! The special education students would come and sit by his habitat at lunchtime just to enjoy his company. A list had to be made up so that everyone would have the opportunity to take him home over weekends and holidays in his portable habitat. Ms. St. Germaine and Osiris brought out wonderful qualities in the students, who proved to be responsible and well-informed caregivers.

I was delighted with the artwork that Osiris had inspired and impressed with the physical details the students had depicted. I had talked about the differences between green iguanas and rock iguanas in the genus *Cyclura* — and all of the pictures display lovely dorsal spines and gular shields.

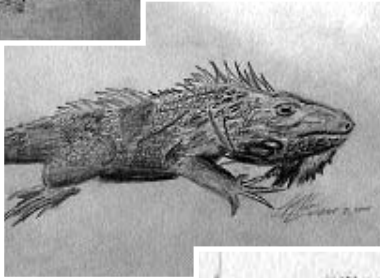
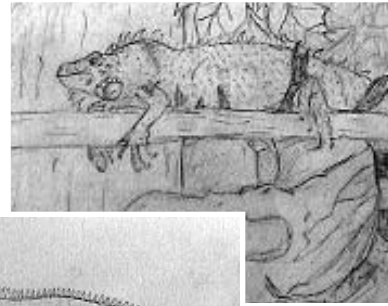
Sadly, the next chapter of Osiris' life was to be less happy, and provides a cautionary tale for all potential iguana owners. For the first time in his life, Osiris had a good diet and proper lighting; he had gained some weight and become quite comfortable with the school routine — and then came breeding season. Again, most likely for the first time in his life, Osiris was healthy enough to experience the hormonal surges of an adult male iguana. He became irritable, occasionally even mildly aggressive, and had a poor appetite. At one point, while the teacher was handling him, he jumped and bit her finger. Fortunately, she was not badly hurt, but she was justifiably concerned for the safety of her students. Together we decided to take the iguana out of the classroom before anyone else had a bad experience. So Osiris is back at the Iguana Sanctuary awaiting another placement, preferably with a male as his primary caregiver or with other iguanas with which he can socialize. Osiris' legacy remains, for the most part, positive from the months he shared with the students of King Philip Middle School.



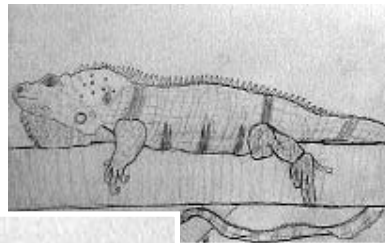


Jonah Small,
Age 13

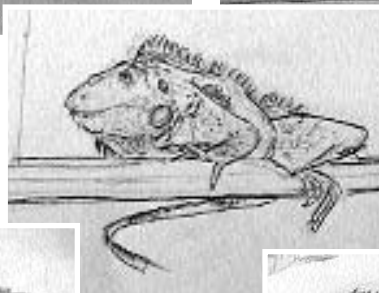
Victoria Skinner,
Age 12



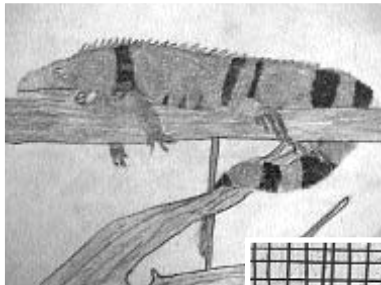
Josh Scheinblum,
Age 12



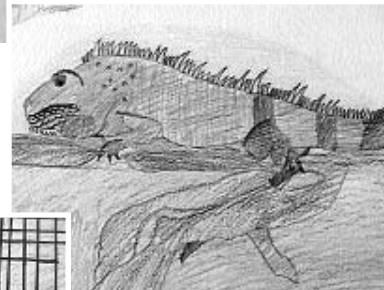
Daniel W.
Goldbaum-
Shortell, Age 13



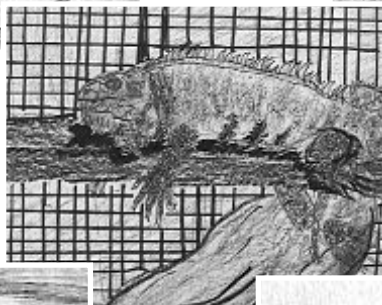
Spencer Glantz, Age 12



Ryan Reitz,
Age 12



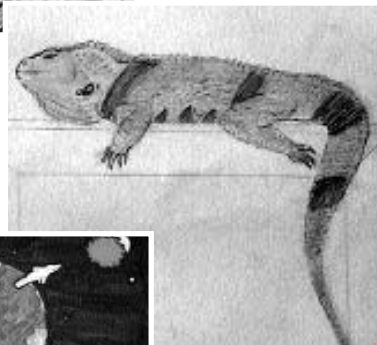
Gregory
Dassonville,
Age 12



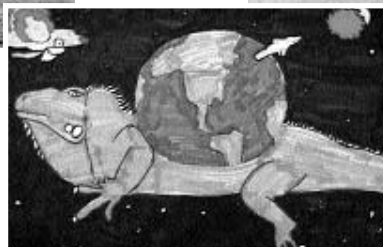
Allegra Levy, Age 11



Michelle Fechtor,
Age 12



Michelle Fechtor,
Age 12



Craig Wentworth, Age 12