OPEN HOUSE IN THE BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT

By "The Old Fossil," at Wells High School, Chicago

An excerpt from a letter received in mid-October: "I was greatly interested in your notation, 'Science Open House Held Last May' (*The American Biology Teacher,* Oct. 1953). As we plan to have one next May, have you any suggestions that would help me?" It was signed by Sister Celestine, Alleman High School, Rock Island, Illinois. TOF believes that his reply will interest others.

"Open House," in this article, is limited to occasions when the school is visited by parents, inspectors, or select visitors. The date is set well in advance. The purpose is to permit visitors to view the physical plant and personnel as a functioning unit. No two "Open Houses" TOF has visited have been alike. This is as it should be; it represents the school in action.

Open House means clean house. The room, adjacent area, and desk should be in proper order and dusted, the wastebasket empty, and blackboards clean. Bulletin boards should display attractive current materials. Students may cover the bases of potted plants with colored paper or aluminum foil, clean and arrange lockers, cabinets, and shelves, polish glassware, retouch and repaint models and apparatus, and refresh aquaria. Art students may prepare signs needed to label displays. Signs will also be needed for instructions, identifications, and descriptions. Painted wood blocks, $1'' \times 2'' \times 6''$, with $\frac{1}{2}''$ saw kerfs, can be used to support the signs.

A simple form of Open House could be for an inspection, as after the dedication of a new building. Or it could be for a periodic check, by the public, to determine the adequacy of facilities.

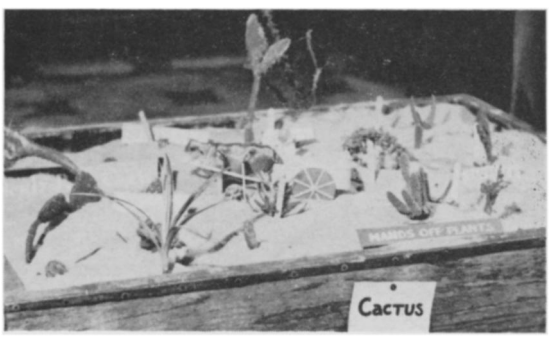
More often Open House is held to permit parents and others to observe school activities. Visitors may evaluate students' records, observe accomplishments and see the students at work. Open House held for any of these reasons, is an excellent opportunity to sell the school to the public.

Some schools hold an Evaluation Evening. The parents visit each of their children's teachers. Pupils are not present; it is a teacher-parent conference. Frequently the discussion is about the character and personality of the child, and may lead to better understandings.

Another Open House theme may be Student Accomplishments. This may be an elaborate display of notebooks, projects, collections, charts, graphs, and essays. Sections of the blackboard may be assigned to pupils for biological drawings in colored chalk. Seasonal materials may be displayed on the walls.

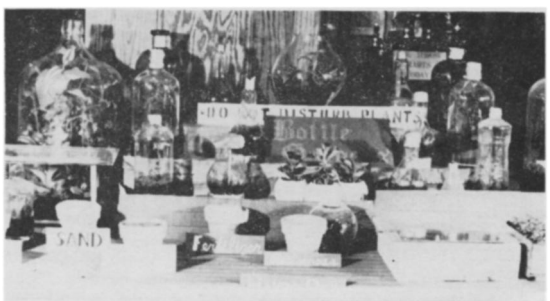
The biology department can help other departments on Open House night. Potted plants, raised in the growing room, can be placed in classrooms, and seasonal flowers in the office. Outstanding biology projects may be displayed at a prominent place in the school. The illustrations with this article show such projects, and are part of a unit of 12 similar table displays made during our Open House last May. Advance planning usually brings out much creative ability in the students, and teaches team work.

Another type of Open House is active participation by the students. The regular school day may be shortened by two periods in the afternoon. In the evening students return for these two periods. Parents and others visit classrooms and laboratories. Laboratory work, in the Biology Department, is excellent for this type of Open House. Students may dissect, work with the microscopes, or engage in other activities. Students may make projection slides prior to Open House. These slides are projected on a screen, and the pupil responsible for making a particular slide gives a thumbnail sketch describing it. This type of Open House has many good features. It is intensive and full of action. However, the visitor sees but one teacher and his pupils in action.



Here is a "Cactus Garden" prepared for Open House. Potted plants, from the school greenhouse, were set in sand to create the landscape effect. Labels were student-made. The Mexican cart was student-inspired to lend "atmosphere" to the scene.

On Open House night, teachers need assistance. Mature students may be selected from each class to run errands, serve as messengers in coordinating all departments. Monitor students may be used to direct traffic, and to escort groups or special guests. Teacher Aides may be used to guard displays, and to protect fire alarms and telephones. A group of the "extra specials" may serve as junior teachers, answering questions, describing displays, and giving information.



"Bottle Gardens" (background) were individual pupil projects, each pupil furnishing his own container. "Gardens" were first planned on paper; plants were then measured, and set up. "Seed Germination" (foreground) showed soil preparation, methods of seeding, and seedlings in developmental stages.

TOF suggests that the Biology Department print its own program. However, if the Open House Committee prepares the general program, it should be a printed directory-program. In this case, the biology instructors prepare their comprehensive section for the master program. This should include room numbers, room locations, and names of instructors, and the activity planned for the room.

Observe all rules for safety from accident and fire. Panic can easily be created within a group of visitors. Recently a Chicago teacher made the newspaper headlines; a minor accident at Open House was compounded into a second accident, which in turn created so much confusion that panic was the result. Fortunately, the two or three taken to the hospital had but minor injuries. The incident did leave a bad taste for Open House. Keep house phones and fire alarms open for service.

This year's officers of long-time active New York Association of Teachers of Biological Sciences are: Herbert Nestler, Pres.; David Sygoda, Vice-Pres., Acad. H.S.; Ruben Fuchs, Vice-Pres., Voc. H.S.; Ira Shein, Vice-Pres., Jr. H.S.; Marion Richter, Rec. Sec'y; Samuel Brownstein, Corr. Sec'y; Henry Pollet, Treas.; Milton Lesser, Rep. to Sc. Council.

PREPARATION OF INSECT MOUNTS

The general biology student who observes and handles an insect individually is more likely to remember key characteristics and to become interested in entomology than the one who merely looks at a specimen or group of specimens in a box or mount.

We have solved the problem of neat storage combined with the possibility of individual handling by mounting insects on pieces of cork one and one-half inches square. Sheets of cork one-fourth inch thick can be purchased inexpensively and cut into squares with a sharp scalpel or razor blade. After the insects are mounted by means of insect pins on the cork squares, each one is sprayed with an acrylic plastic spray as outlined by Pond.[1] Various plastic sprays are acceptable for use. The cork mounts fit easily into boxes for storage.

Specimens prepared thus have been handled in our laboratories by more than 100 students without the usual loss of delicate parts of fragile insects.

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Across The Editor's Desk

Paul A. McGhee, New York University, lodges a "true bill" for adult education against our colleges, stating: (1) "Adult education takes place in community action groups, but our colleges essentially stand apart from our thousands of communities; (2) the colleges' basic commitment is to subject matter scholarship, but the need of adult education is not for information but for experience in group work; (3) the colleges have only teachers, whereas the adult education movement needs leaders."

[1] Pond, Gordon G., Preservation of Insect Specimens, *Turtox News,* Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 69. April, 1953.