Great Lakes Stewardship: Post-Schoolship Community Involvement

The mission of Inland Seas Education Association's (ISEA's) Great Lakes Schoolship Program is to encourage young people to pursue academic disciplines related to the Great Lakes, particularly the sciences, and also ***to promote enhanced public understanding and stewardship toward the Great Lakes and freshwater on a worldwide basis.***

We developed this section of the Teacher's Guide to empower you to take initiative in your own community and pave a path for your students towards stewardship of the Great Lakes region.

Educator Myles Horton had what he called the two-eyed approach to teaching: with one eye he tried to look at students as they are, while with the other eye he looked at what they might become. He also believed that people with problems are the people with the solutions. Some problems in our local communities are hard to tackle, but sometimes all we need is the inspiration of a small group of focused students to help us understand its importance.

Freshwater ecosystems are a rare and vital global resource. The United Nations declared this year as the "Year of Freshwater 2003". Many of the suggestions for community involvement below are focused on freshwater conservation and education in honor of this global holiday. Please show your commitment as a steward of the Great Lakes and challenge yourself and your students to try something new in the classroom.

Contact us with comments on how you used some of these ideas or with suggestions for a specific age group. Let us help you share ideas with the Great Lakes community. Send us pictures of you and your students in action and send us your completed Great Lakes Stewardship Pledge Cards. We will post these in our new Inland Seas Education Center.

Simple Things You Can Do As A Great Lakes Steward

Avoid toxic chemical use and learn how to dispose of wastes properly. Find alternatives for homes, businesses, and schools.

Break your students into their Schoolship groups. Have them list the main threats to the health of the Great Lakes, then create a list of possible solutions they could employ. If any student is ready, have then fill out a Great Lakes Stewardship Pledge Card on page 81 and send it to us.

Calculate a personal water consumption analysis. Use the formulas in the "Audit Your Water Use" activity. Help students make a plan to conserve water.

Finish compiling data from all groups and combine in a graphic display. Draw possible conclusions with regard to the environment e.g. effects of pollution, effects of nearby streams, prevailing winds, type of sediment, etc.

Set up a freshwater aquarium. Students can research which native plants and fish should inhabit the aquarium.

Create water conservation informational signs. Hold a contest for the best designs and most accurate facts. Then, post the winning design in school bathrooms and the cafeteria. Contact local restaurants, gas stations, and stores to hang these signs in their public bathrooms and show their support.

It Takes Some Effort

Explore your local drinking water consumer confidence reports. Check www.epa.gov/safewater.dwinfo.htm. Schools are usually non-transient, non-community water systems. Know if your water source has a good history or if it needs attention.

Think of adopting a lake or stream, as a class, school or community. Learn about the history of the water body, who is using it and how to protect it. Keep it clean as a group. Contact the Adopt-A-Stream Program. Check http://www.dcr.state.va.us/sw/adopt.htm.

Invite your students to become Eco-pals with students in schools on the other side of the Great Lakes. Writing about their local environment will sharpen their observation skills, while sharing observations with friends in Wisconsin or Canada will help connect students to regional environmental issues shared.

As part of a biology unit, contact your local Conservation District office for native seeds and info on stream bank stabilization projects. Plant native vegetation to prevent erosion and provide habitat on school grounds or community parks.

Conduct a plastic water bottle collection and reuse campaign. Decorate these bottles with a conservation logo and facts about human physiological water needs or bottled water facts. Refill these and use them in school, sports, and on field trips.

Set up a freshwater natural history museum space at school or in your classroom. Incorporate the plankton/ zooplankton video that your class recorded while on the Schoolship. Parent-teacher conferences are a great time to host the Great Lakes natural history museum.

Consider the language arts possibilities that the shipboard experience may stimulate (i.e. poetry, paintings, sea shantey songs, historical investigations, or interviews with elders.)
Invite other classes and teachers from other disciplines to participate by:

a. Offering tours, guided by your students, of your exhibits.
b. Setting up a Great Lakes speakers bureau and let interested students develop Great Lakes topic reports to give to other groups.

Suggestions For The Committed

Encourage your students to write papers and do their presentations on water issues. Water affects all areas of society and can be built into any subject: science, history, geography, politics, and language courses. Work to add water into the curriculum, in particular over the upcoming year as the United Nations celebrates the International Year of Freshwater 2003.

Students could engage in public service by conducting studies and performing functions with local units of government. They can assist with air quality monitoring, public health surveying, water quality assessments, invasive species monitoring, etc.

As major users of community parks, students could study the history of the parks, survey local residents' use and desires, sample students' use and desires, and develop a neighborhood plan for park development and improvement.

Think of mapping your local water resources by creating a map with either scientific, cultural, historical, wildlife, observations. Map where there are problems or local stories relating to a river or lake. This is a good tool to not only keep a record of what this water means to your community, but to educate others and to see where there are problems, and what needs to be done to ensure the protection of the resource.

In cooperation with local artists and an arts council, students could create outdoor murals to beautify the local environment. Consider the message for the future the students could pass along. Caribbean revolutionary C.L. R. James thought the artistic expressions of ordinary people contain truths essential for social change.

Be creative! Organize art exhibits or poetry readings with a focus on water. Organize photography contests or poster contests in your area for the International Year of Freshwater 2003.

As part of curriculum focused on water issues, students could develop a water efficiency program for their school, with the savings placed in a fund to capitalize new venture development by students.

Create a learning environment where students can explore, share, risk, make decisions, and construct answers. Where experience, imagination, and initiative are the raw materials of learning, and reflection is necessary for growth.

There is an article entitled “When Youths Lead” from the March issue of YES! A Journal of Positive Futures (www.yesmagazine.org) that reminds us of the real potential of a small group of students focused on stewardship.

Imagine what your students could do.

Sources

Horton, Myles with Judith Kohl and Herbert Kohl. The Long Haul: An Autobiography. New York: Teachers College Press. 1998

Buhle, P.1988. C.L.R James: The Artist as Revolutionary. New York: Verso