

Lake Country Elementary students get lessons in water quality, composting and worms

How important is it for our future generations to understand water quality, watersheds and how to take care of our soil? To Kathy Robinson, Reading Coach for Lake Country Elementary School, it is critical. Last month about 280 students were educated on these subjects and had a chance to get outside and experience some hands-on learning. Ms. Robinson arranged to have Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District's, Erin McCarta, Lakes Management Assistant and me, Corine Burgess, Natural Resources Specialist visit the school's 3rd, 4th and 5th grade classes.

The first day consisted of two stations. Erin McCarta talked about water quality and used the school's pond as her classroom. The pond was paid for by a Splash Grant the school was awarded from the Southwest Florida Water Management District. Erin used the equipment that is used by county staff to test water quality in our lakes. The students were allowed to take samples, use the equipment to test the water and recorded water quality readings. Once they had a chance to hear what Erin had to say, each class switched sides and I had the opportunity to teach them about watersheds using the Enviroscape model. The model presents a watershed with lots of wetlands, which are depicted by sponges. Various substances are sprinkled on the model representing fertilizer, pesticides, soil and oil – then a water can is sprinkled representing rain on the model and the students see how these pollutants go into our lakes. Once most of the wetlands (sponges) are removed, the kids get to see how much more pollution winds up in our lakes. It is a very effective, visual lesson and it is a great way to get the kids to interact.

The second day was all about compost and worms. Third grade classes enjoyed the outdoors for a brief session on composting. Erin and I made up cards consisting of the elements that it takes to make compost such as banana peels, leaves, coffee grounds, air, moisture and the sun. Each student was handed a card and asked to come up when their element was called out. Once all the kids were up, they were encouraged to mix around and bump into each other. The exercise got them to giggling but it also taught them how compost is made. The Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District also donated a composter to the school so that students can bring in their organic waste and compost on site.

Once the “compost skit” was over it was time to move on to worms! Staff brought a worm composter to allow the students to see, first hand, how to make one. Then they were asked questions about worms and when the right answer was called out, the student was rewarded with a piece of candy. A small bucket of worms was donated to the school so that each third grade class can make their own worm composter for their classroom.

By getting the kids outdoors and out of the classroom for a while, they are not only having fun, but they are learning by doing. Each student was allowed to try out a piece of equipment, ask questions and interact with the groups.

Within two days, over 250 students were involved in these learning sessions. Erin and I had a great time with the kids and it seemed as though they were having a lot of fun too. Hopefully the students learned something that they will use and remember. Teachers were on board with ideas of getting the kids involved with composting at school.

Learning by doing is a creative way to teach. Students retain what they learn when they can visually experience the subject matter. By getting outside, changing their ordinary scenery, physically participating in the lesson and being encouraged to ask and answer questions, they are absorbing knowledge. If learning is “fun” then it will also be effective.

If you are interested in a presentation for your club or classroom, give us a call at (863) 402-6545.