

First Graders from Memorial Elementary School learn about Agriculture

On March 23rd, about 100 first graders learned plenty about agriculture. Corine Burgess, Natural Resources Specialist and Jackie Bailey, Officer Manager for the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District spent the morning with Memorial Elementary School's first graders. Lots of interaction, reading, holding live worms and a crawl through the soil tunnel were activities that the kids and teachers participated in.

The children seemed most delighted with a mysterious crawl through the soil tunnel. The tunnel consists of a 6' table with a dark cloth draped over the top to make it dark inside. Attached to the table are pieces of cloth decorated with photographs and drawings of creatures that live below the ground. While crawling through the dark underground world, students were provided with a flashlight and encouraged to look all around and up to see what types of life exists below the surface. As they ventured through this great, adventurous place, they come upon many life-like plastic creatures that either delighted or scared them! It is a fantastic learning experience because not only is it fun for the kids, but it is a visual lesson. The experience really gets them thinking about what lives under the ground they walk on every day!

Kicking off the presentation, Corine Burgess read *Green Florida Farms*, written by Gary Seamans and Illustrated by Mike Wright. This is just one of many books supplied by an organization called Florida Agriculture in the Classroom, Inc. (FAITC) each year to volunteering agencies. This organization also provides materials and curricula on the importance of agriculture to educational organizations. Reading the book provided a wonderful opportunity to allow the youths to ask and answer questions and interact with the presenters as well as each other.

Following the reading, a brief, interactive PowerPoint presentation was given to show what lives and exists below the surface of the earth. After which, students were anxious to explore the tunnel! Once the "underground" experience was over, each student was invited to hold a living worm. That's right – a Red Wiggler to be precise!

Worms are fascinating animals and students learned about their importance while holding the slimy creatures. For example, worms are decomposers, which means they eat dead things and without them the world would certainly be a dirty, smelly place. Kids were taught that where there are worms, there's healthy soil. While experiencing a hands-on opportunity with the worms, children were educated about the benefits of worm composting or vermicomposting.

Isn't it hard to believe that each child could have the opportunity to absorb this much knowledge in only a 30 minute session? We, at the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District, believe that by instructing children with hands-on, interactive, fun lessons, they retain what they learn and have a great time in the process. It is our hope that these experiences will be part of their memories for a long time to come.

Jackie Bailey stated that "It is always a pleasure to visit the children and educate them on how to become better stewards of our natural resources." As for Corine, she feels that "This is the best part of my job, interacting with people and sharing my knowledge with them. I especially love

to work with children because they are so easily pleased and they get excited over the littlest things. They are like little sponges, soaking up knowledge, yet they give me as much or more than I give them. I love the look on their faces as they light up when they know the answer to a question or after they have experienced something new. It makes my day, but the hugs are the absolute best!”

The Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District is committed to educating people about our natural resources. If you are interested in a presentation for your organization, please give us a call at (863) 402-6545.