

Learning the three green Rs at school

By Jane Whiting

School children today are learning the importance of the three Rs of the environment along with their reading, writing and numerical skills. As more schools embrace the concepts of reduce, reuse and recycle, school boards are partnering with organizations and the community to put earth-friendly practices into the classroom and the playground.

In collaboration with EarthCARE Canada, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has implemented energy conserving, waste reducing and water saving initiatives at their schools. Now the efforts of OCDSB elementary and secondary schools can be recognized and evaluated at EarthCARE Expo 2008 on May 8 at the Confederation Education Centre. Combining environmental awareness with academic talents, awards are being given to schools and students for demonstrating innovative projects and outstanding achievements, as well as essays, poetry and posters that promote earth-friendly messages and activities.

The event will feature special guest speaker, Simon Jackson, who is the Canadian founder of one of the world's largest youth-run environmental organizations to save the Spirit Bear. In addition to EarthCARE's David Suzuki Award, there will also be a new Jenny Award in memory of the late Jennifer Teague who was a former OCDSB student and a member of the EarthCARE team at her school.

According to an OCDSB report, schools across the board collectively reduced their CO₂ emissions last year by 16.7 tonnes, which is the equivalent of planting 554 mature trees. With the Lights Off/Computers Off campaign, overall energy costs were reduced by approx \$1.8 million and an LED light exchange program resulted in saving enough electricity to power five households for a year. Other waste reduction programs included litterless lunches and projects to run green buildings, provide greener schoolyards and clean up community parks.

A few individual OCDSB elementary schools have already highlighted their environmental efforts and share some of their activities and ideas. The EarthCARE team at Richmond Public School meets weekly with team leader Christine Dazé during morning recess to work on their many projects which include:

- Weekly recycling.
- Creating LOCO door hangers to remind people to turn the lights out/computers off.
- Light switch covers.
- Wasteless Wednesdays. Litterless lunch day with bonus points if the teacher also brings a litterless lunch. Classes are recognized with prizes such as a game party at lunch time, or a food treat and they receive the stuffed animal mascot for their room.
- Skits on how to make a litterless lunch.
- Awards for clean, tidy classrooms - transcends to looking after the earth.
- Student morning announcements describing what teachers do to help promote a green planet e.g., recycling at home, short showers, composting, litterless lunches etc.
- Interviewing students for morning announcements about what they do for a green environment.
- Posting EC messages e.g., bulletin board in hallway “The World is in Our Hands.”

Adrienne Clarkson Elementary School started the first phase of a multi-year project to transform their school grounds. With recommendations from an Evergreen consultant and a grant from the City of Ottawa’s Green Partnership Program, the school greening project involved students, staff, parents and surrounding community members in developing a natural landscape design and maintenance plan. Last fall, more than 50 volunteers turned out to spread compost and mulch to improve the soil for new and existing plantings at the school this spring. Community members and local businesses also contributed by supplying coffee, pizza, and rental equipment.

With the help of teacher Alison Sinclair and parent volunteer Lana Lotan, students at Jockvale Public School found an interesting way to reuse their weekly pizza boxes while completing curriculum requirements for social studies and the arts. The Pizza Box Dragon project ties into celebrating cultural traditions around the world and producing multi dimensional works of art. Here are their step-by-step instructions:

1. Begin the dragon’s body by forming the pizza boxes into tubes and taping them into place; each pizza box will be a section of the dragon's body.

Next, cover each section with papier maché. We suggest using used chart paper and a mixture of white glue and water to make the papier maché.

2. Build up the dragon's face; add details with cardboard and paper. This will give some character to your dragon.

3. All that is left is the painting and you have a dragon that is ready for:

- Chinese New Year celebration
- Creative writing
- Storytelling
- Poetry writing
- Dramatic arts

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