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News from the Network

Environmental Education is Critical, but how do you make the message stick?

by Caren Trafford

It has never been more critical to educate our students on the value of water, sewage & recycling. In a generation of Playstation™ and SMS, the crucial messages are too often lost or overlooked.

The challenge for us, as environmental educators, is to engage students and take them past the present into their future; to spark their creativity and involvement and to sow a lifetime understanding of these critical environmental issues.

As an environmental educator, I found there was a demand for a method of teaching that would make environmental topics interesting and engaging – fun - while not detracting from the central messages that needed to be told.

How do you package the message so that students retain the information? What is the medium that would compete with the instant fix? One solution is a format called Narrative Non-Fiction; in which the science, facts and messages are woven with humour into an illustrated story. Each fact, every theme has an image that invites exploration and a “quip” that tickles the funny bone.

This unique genre provides a great breadth of access and understanding across all ages and learning abilities: younger students access the information through pictures and can enjoy the stories read to them by their teachers and parents; older students can see the humour in the illustrations which reinforce the details contained in the text.

Follow through is achieved with engaging web-based fact sheets and experiments, which act as companions to each book. This process provides a second tier reinforcement, placing the information already gleaned in the wider context of every-day life with hands on experiments. These free fact sheets help to create interesting extensions to lesson plans.

To date, these educational resources cover 3 crucial environmental areas. 'Water...the Amazing Journey', provides insights into the chemistry of water, its vital place in life as we know it and how civilisations have flourished and failed based on the availability of water.

The later sections discuss modern water storage, treatment & reticulation and concepts for water conservation and management.

In the same way, 'Where does the POO go when you Flush,' traces the history of sewage and how we have dealt with faeces from the ancient pits, night-soil to fully reticulated sewage systems & biosolids re-use.

The first book in the series, 'A Worm's Eye View... the History of the World,' deals more generally with soil health as well as the impact and value of recycling organics to the soil.

These environmental resources are now being used in 6 countries including Korea. The formula of using humour and repetition in a non-invasive manner is a hit amongst students, teachers and parents and has proved a very successful method for imbuing students with knowledge about their environment that they will carry with them into their adult life.

Caren is the author of the above children's books and is also coordinating the National Environmental Art Competition 'H₂O in 2020'. For more information visit www.planetkids.biz or contact Caren directly at caren_traff@csi.com.



These books are also available for purchase through Corinne Cheeseman at AWA. A percentage of the proceeds of books purchased from AWA will be returned to the WEN.

'News from the Network' is open to participants of the water education network across Australia, providing an opportunity to showcase water education programs/ activities etc. If you have a story that would be of interest to the WEN network to feature in this segment please email it to ccheeseman@awa.asn.au. 'News from the Network' stories may be up to 400 words in length. Please also include a photo or picture.