



Celebration and Action: Lessons from FLOC's Earth Day Celebration

On April 22, 2007, almost 200 students, families and volunteers from the District of Columbia and West Virginia gathered at For Love of Children's Outdoor Education Center in Harpers Ferry to celebrate Earth Day. The day included a renowned speaker from the mid-Atlantic region and gave students from both FLOC campuses an opportunity to engage in community service and craft projects, participate in environmental learning stations, as well as play a part in campfire story telling and drumming workshops. Throughout the day, students and families rotated through different areas of the Outdoor Education Center (OEC) and were able to learn more about sustaining their environment through hands-on activities.



Students and volunteers participated in a reforestation project, using native saplings acquired from the Eastern Panhandle Conservation District. In a matter of a few hours, over 20 trees were planted around the facility. These trees will provide additional wildlife habitats and increase the riparian buffer area along the Bullfrog Branch, a stream that meanders through the property. Through this activity, participants learned about the optimal environment for trees and how to properly introduce the fragile saplings to their new surroundings.

Throughout the day, guided tours of environmental learning stations were conducted by FLOC staff members. The learning stations introduced students and families to alternative energy sources and the dangers of erosion. Using a unique stream erosion simulator, students observed how to manipulate water flow by manually shifting the river bank sand. The erosion simulator effectively showed students the effects of erosion and

how environmental changes can affect an entire watershed. The students were then took a walk to a nearby stream to see the how erosion had changed the stream overtime.



Overall, the mood of the Earth Day Celebration was jovial, giving participants an opportunity to engage in their surroundings in a new way. At upper camp students participated in African drumming and dance lessons, where they learned how drums are used to communicate messages and how their unique construction can affect the sound of that message. After a quick drumming lesson, students were up and moving around the campfire, learning African inspired songs and mimicking Takada Harris' dance moves. In addition, students participated in story and legend telling, with Ellen Roche, FLOC's Board Chair, who enlightened students as to why chipmunks have stripes and why turtles were meant to move slowly.



Between sessions, participants heard from Paul Pritchard of The National Park Trust. He addressed environmental concerns in the mid-Atlantic region and how FLOC students and families from DC and West Virginia can make a difference in their community. He

suggested the audience start with thinking about why our Earth is going through such catastrophic changes and what we can do to help--from eating organic foods to planting a tree. Beyond taking deliberate steps to change their environment, Pritchard asked everyone to take time to focus on becoming initiators of change instead of blame shifting.

In closing, Paul encouraged participants not to take their experience at the OEC for granted; borrowing from Michael Frome, he quoted, "Everywhere in the country the land, the rivers, the estuaries...are treated only as commodities to be bought and sold, explored and exploited for material benefits only, never to be safeguarded by one generation as a sacred trust for the next generation." Upon surveying the fresh planted trees and satisfied smiles of the 2007 Earth Day participants, one can say with certainty that they are better able to safeguard that trust.