

The Water Watch

Subject: Language Arts, Science

Duration: 45-60 minutes

Location: Classroom

Key Vocabulary: Resource, conservation

Related Activities: Water Poetry; Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades, and the Rainy Season in Three Cups; We're Sponging Off the Everglades; What's That Slippery Mess?; Shrimp Scampers

Florida Sunshine State Standards: LA.4.3.1.2, SC.4.L.17, LA.5.3.1.2, SC.5.L.15, LA.6.3.1.2, SC.6.L.14



Materials

- Copies of “The Water Watch”

Objectives: The student will be able to: a) list two reasons why water conservation is necessary for the preservation of the Everglades, b) list two ways in which they can increase community involvement in water conservation, and c) produce a petition which lists ways to conserve water and get at least one hundred signatures on their petition.

Method: The students will read a short story which recognizes the necessity of water conservation for the preservation of the Everglades and promotes community involvement by the students.

Background: Everyone recognizes the importance of water for our existence. We use water in many ways; however, people aren't the only ones who depend on clean water. Many different kinds of plants and animals that live in the Everglades/South Florida depend on water, too! Sharing the resource means working together to protect our lakes, rivers, canals, and wetlands!

Suggested Procedure

1. Have the students read aloud, “The Water Watch,” by Julie Langdon.
2. Upon completion of the story, discuss the prevalent issues concerning water misuse with your students.

Evaluation

Ask the students how they personally will assist in water conservation and promote community involvement and awareness regarding these issues. Have the students develop a petition or resolution which lists ways to conserve water. Ask them to find supporters to sign their petition.

THE WATER WATCH

By Julie Langdon

Marie was twelve years old, and she lived in a house on the edge of the Everglades. Marie loved to play and ramble outdoors, along with her best friend, Skip. Skip was a year younger and he lived pretty close to Marie. On the particular year in question, Marie and Skip were enjoying long bike rides in the country. On weekends they would pack a lunch and take off for the day.

One Saturday, they followed a road into Everglades National Park. It was flat, easy riding. They stopped near a trail and locked up their bikes so they could walk for a while. It was early winter, so the weather was dry and sunny, and there was no one else on the trail. They moved out on a boardwalk over the water and lay down to catch some sun and just relax.

“GLUMPH!”

“Hey, what was that? Great gumbo limbo, look at the size of that lizard!” shouted Skip, looking at an alligator. It was a baby gator, dark with yellow stripes, floating peacefully near the edge of the water. They watched the gator for some time, totally fascinated. They gave a start when Marie suddenly realized that it was nearly time for dinner. “My mother will scalp me!” said Marie, and they headed for home; but they resolved to return the following Saturday to find the little gator again.

A week finally passed, and the two friends hopped on their bikes and headed for their special place. They lay down on the wooden boardwalk, perfectly still, perfectly quiet, waiting.

SNAP! A stick broke behind them. Startled half to death, they rolled over on their backs and looked up at the biggest, tallest man they had ever seen. He was wearing a strange hat, and he had on a grey shirt with a badge. He was carrying a burlap sack. “We weren’t doing anything,” stammered Skip, who always felt guilty for some reason. The stranger smiled and they all relaxed. It turned out that he was a park ranger, and his name was Keith. He was interested when the kids told him how they had come to the Everglades to see the gator. He explained what he happened to be doing that day. He would be coming every Saturday to measure the depth of the water and take a sample. The sample would be analyzed by scientists to see if it was pure and healthy. Skip and Marie helped sink the measuring stick in the water so they could read the depth. “How come you want to know the water depth?” asked Marie. Before Keith could answer, they heard “GLUMPH, GLUMPH.” “There goes the answer,” said Keith, as a gator propelled himself through the water with his tail. “When I see you next Saturday, I’ll take you out and show you some important things about the water here in the Everglades. Wear old clothes, because we’ll get dirty, for sure.”

Marie and Skip were early, in anticipation of a great day. Keith led them on a hike out into the sawgrass, and stopped near a pit in the ground. The pit had some wet mud in the center, and a small puddle here and there. Keith said, “This is a gator hole, and it’s part of the reason we rangers care so much about water in the Everglades. Remember the little gator we saw last week? Well, the alligators depend on water for their survival, and in the dry season they dig holes like this one, where they can stay wet. In the old days, there was a good deal of water in these holes; but, as you can see, many of them are just mud puddles these days.” Skip and Marie were very upset, that the life of their baby gator might be threatened, but they didn’t really understand why or how this happened. “Well,” said Keith, “you need to know more about water.” In the weeks that followed, Keith met the children every Saturday and they helped him with his project.

Marie and Skip learned a whole new way of looking at water. Until they met the Everglades, they had always looked at water from a peoples' eye-view. It came out of the faucet when you turned it on. You could swim in it; you could make orange juice with it; you could take a bath in it; you could shoot it out of squirt guns. There was no end to what you could do with it, and there seemed to be no end to the water itself.

Skip and Marie soon learned, however, a "critters'" eye-view of water. They found out what a precious resource water is in the natural world, and how it really does have limits.

When Marie and Skip started hiking out into the sawgrass glades, they began to notice water as the home of many animals. Keith showed them several kinds of fish and they spotted many kinds of frogs and turtles floating with the lily pads. They became acquainted with many alligators of all ages. They saw them lying on the sunny banks, and they watched them propel themselves through the water. They had an especially fine time one afternoon when they spotted a family of otters. The otters were long and furry, like greased lightning in the water! Even the deer didn't seem to mind wading through the wet areas to eat the sawgrass. The water was a place to live, and the animals could not survive without it.

Keith showed them how the animals depend on the plants for food and shelter, and how plants depend on water. They used water and the vitamins and nutrients that came with it. The water was feeding both plants and animals. Without water, opossums, rabbits, birds, and even people could not live.

Some animals even used water to control their body temperatures. People can jump into a swimming pool or take a shower to cool off, or take a hot bath to get warm. Well, cold-blooded animals, like fish and reptiles, use water in the same way. When the air gets suddenly cold, the water usually stays warm for a while. So an alligator will head for the bottom of the water when it's cold. When air heats up, the water feels cooler. Alligators will swim to keep their body from over-heating. Instead of flipping on heaters or air conditioners, animals depend on water to control their temperatures.

Skip and Marie came to believe water was a precious element; it helps keep everything in nature together. All the plants and animals had one thing in common: they needed water! Water even links people to the natural world because we need it too!

Losing water is the greatest danger animals could face. "But how could they lose water?" asked Marie. Keith had the answers ready. People built too many canals and dams which stopped water from flowing into the Everglades. And mostly, people took water for granted. They thought there was a limitless supply. They didn't stop to think that the more they used, the less the animals and plants would have.

Skip and Marie got really involved. They decided something had to be done to protect the future of both people and wild things. But how?

They decided that there was strength in numbers! They started a club at school called the Water Watch. Keith came and spoke to the members about the importance of water.

The Water Watch members helped the rangers on their water studies. They reached out to the whole community. They wrote skits and plays to present at school, churches, and PTA meetings. The Water Watch pledged never to waste water.

And most of all, they pledged never to forget those wonderful, wild things in the Everglades!