

Earth Day Lunch and Learn



In-school event provides hands-on educational activities for Connecticut students.

*by Abigail Forget
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A simple lunchtime event with worms, bugs, and plastic bottles at Riverside School in Greenwich, Conn., provided important lessons about recycling, the environment, and conservation.

Riverside's Earth Day celebration included two interactive projects for students. It was organized by the school's PTA, with a big hand from the town's conservation analyst and the school principal.

At one station, kids created penguins made from recycled plastic water bottles, paper, and felt and signed a pledge to help protect the environment. The project reminded the students that they can recycle one thing to create something new; the pledge reinforced the idea of protecting the environment for vulnerable animals like penguins. At the other station, students used magnifying glasses to observe worms and completed an activity sheet about the worms' behavior and role in composting.

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“We had always celebrated Earth Day with an outdoor assembly where we encouraged walking to school and recycling, but [2016] was the first time there were activities kids could participate in,” says Stephanie Bastek, the PTA’s vice president of community. Riverside principal Christopher Weiss says students enjoyed the hands-on activities: “They actually got to build something, and it really tied into our recycling program.”

To prepare for the projects, Greenwich conservation analyst Aleksandra Moch collected and painted plastic water bottles from town hall and the public works transfer station. The PTA helped Moch gather and cut recycled paper for decorating the penguins.



For the worm station, Moch brought worms from her home compost bin, plastic magnifying glasses, and spray bottles for kids to keep the worms moist. Parents helped Moch find additional worms and pill bugs the day of the event in the woods by the school. During the observation, students learned that worms like a dark environment, why they wiggle, and why they need to be moist.

“Worms are a great thing for children,” Moch says. “Not only can they learn about [composting with worms] but they learn about worm biology.”



The PTA had eight parent volunteers, four at each station, for two two-hour shifts. Each project took about 10 minutes to complete; the kids rotated through the stations at different times depending on their lunch and recess period. Since the worms were free and the bottles recycled, the only cost to the PTA was for the supplies to create the penguins.

An assembly following the projects hosted speakers from the community, including Moch. It also featured a song about composting from the 4th and 5th grade choruses and displayed several students' projects about recycling and reducing waste in the school. After the assembly, students met up with their reading buddies from another class and relaxed with a book at Riverside's tree sanctuary.

"[Riverside] is in a beautiful location with beautiful trees," Weiss says, adding that the reading period showed students that Earth Day is not just about caring for the Earth, but also for celebrating the Earth.

Riverside School

Greenwich, Conn.

480 students; K-5

Preparing for Earth Day

January

- Approach conservation expert to help students learn about worms and worm composting
- Arrange for supply of worms to be available day of event

Early April

- Gather and paint plastic water bottles for penguin project
- Collect recycled paper
- Purchase felt and other supplies still needed for penguin project

Day of event

- During morning announcements, tell students there will be Earth Day-related projects during lunch
- Bring worms from composting station to school

One to two hours before event

- Work with custodians to set up tables for projects
- Help set up worms in bins for observation
- Help collect any additional worms or bugs in woods
- Cut paper and felt for students to glue on penguins

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