



Environmental and Outdoor Education

By Rob Baker

Environmental stewardship is one of the four guiding principles of Hilldale School. Our students do not simply read one chapter about ecology in a science textbook each year and hope to understand what ecology and environmental principles are all about, as in many other schools. Environmental education is infused throughout our curriculum. Teachers talk about water, air, and ground pollution, global warming, habitat conservation, rain forest destruction, endangered ecosystems and animals, and many other ecological topics. During the past three years, the theme "think globally, but act locally" has started to become a reality at Hilldale, as we have planted flowers and scrubs around our campus, discussed ways to lower the heating bills, and have done campus clean-ups.

In May of 2004, Ms. Martin and Mr. Sawyer took our 6th and 7th graders to the Walker Creek Ranch outdoor education camp in Marin County. The students spent four nights and five days living in nature, going on hikes, composting their food, and learning how each individual has an impact on the environment.

Last year, Mr. Sawyer led our 4th -8th graders to the Mosaic Project in Marin County. This program not only teaches the students about nature, but also focuses on building self-esteem and community spirit. Students from different schools and ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds are mixed together and led by trained staff in exploring the students' similarities and differences and understanding that such diversity should be respected and embraced. Mr. Sawyer and the upper school students had such a great experience last time that another Hilldale group, our 4th and 5th graders, will attend the camp this spring.

Mr. Sawyer, Hilldale's Outdoor Education Coordinator, will lead the 6th -8th graders on a trip to Ashland, Oregon next week. All students, as well as a majority of the students' parents, will be attending. This is a multi-disciplinary trip, exploring the beautiful outdoors of Crater Lake, Snowshoe, and numerous rivers and waterfalls. The students will also experience a hands-on science museum and a theater performance of "The Importance of Being Ernest." It should be an exciting trip!

We have already had preliminary discussions about next year's upper school outdoor education field trip to Yosemite National Park, and a 5th - 6th grade trip to Walker Creek Ranch. Experiential learning about the environment makes the concepts come alive at Hilldale!