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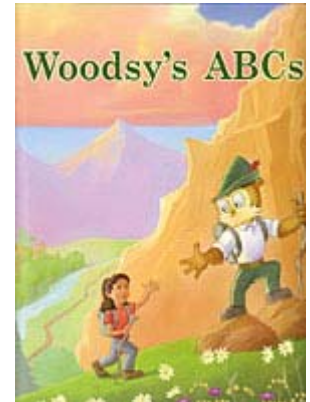
Head Start and US Forest Service Pioneers New "Woodsy Owl" Science Program

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When Tracey Stage called the Cradle of Forestry to arrange a field trip for her Bell Elementary Head Start class, she had no idea what she was getting into.

Soon the Head Start Bureau and Cindy Carpenter with the US Forest Service called and asked Tracy and her class to be among the first Head Start classrooms in the nation to participate in a science pilot program called "Woodsy Owl," a collaboration between the USDA Forest Service and Head Start.



Adults might remember Woodsy from "Give a hoot! Don't pollute!" But that is old hat. Woodsy Owl has become proactive and is entering classrooms with his new slogan, "Give a hand! Care for the land!"

The program helps children begin to understand and appreciate their environment. The Forest Service provided Tracey with a "Woodsy's ABCs" book, complete with reading units and activities. "We learned about wetlands, deserts, and forests. We learned about animals and the water cycle. My children know all about evaporation. We spent a whole day on that word!"

Tracey adjusted the activity centers so that the dramatic play area turned into a two-person tent with sleeping bags and the book center turned into a shady spot under a tree. "We did lots of experiments!" Tracey recalls. "We studied air. We took the children outside and used pin wheels to show that air is there even though we don't see it."



With every letter of the alphabet, the class covered a different Earth-related subject. "For the letter C, we explored clouds. We went outside and the children drew pictures of clouds, and then compared them to photos of cirrus and other types of clouds."

Tracey read to the children about where food comes from and how plants grow. "We learned that plants need water, light and sometimes special food. Then the class planted seeds and measured them to see how much they grew. The marigolds were ready just in time for Mother's Day!"

The program also included educational fieldtrips to many wonderful local resources such as the Recycling Center, the WNC Nature Center and Cradle of Forestry. "I love the Cradle of Forestry!" Tracey says. "We explored old trains and a helicopter used to extinguish fires, the children did a search-and-discover activity with magnifying glasses, and then they put on a puppet show about a tree!"

Sally Snag, a once-beautiful, but now dying, old tree, taught the children that resources are recycled in nature. "It was a hoot!" Tracey says about the program that will hopefully continue to sow the seeds of greater appreciation for the Earth and its resources for generations to come. Tracey and her Bell Head Start classroom are looking forward to an ongoing collaboration with the Forest Service. The Forest Service is considering extending the collaboration to additional Head Start classrooms.

Many Head Start children are from families on low incomes. The goal of the collaboration between Head Start and the US Forest Service is to target three to five-year-old Head Start children who might otherwise grow into their teens without being introduced to the environment and how to care for it.

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