



Zach Wilkins, who was in my grade 6 class the year before, brought me a script that he had co-written with his mother the previous summer. I read it. I could best describe *An Environmental Tale* as Dickens meets the environment. The main character, Mr. D. Stroy, is a nasty developer who is destroying the environment around Lake Simcoe for his own profit. He is visited by three ghosts who try to convince him that he needs to change his ways or bad things will happen to him and the community. Sound familiar? The script detailed Mr. Stroy's Scrooge-like journey into discovering that the environment is worth protecting and that he can make a difference.

At Lakeside Public School in Keswick, we have developed a new arts-module plan for the Intermediate students to help keep them engaged and committed to their learning. Each student is required to make selections in music, drama and dance, visual arts, and physical education choices they would enjoy in order to meet the requirements of the arts curriculum. We offer everything from mountain biking, instrumental band, woodworking, fashion design, cooking classes, and several other choices.

I went to the principal with Zach's script and asked if Zach could direct and produce it in the form of a movie in order to meet his drama-module requirement. My grade 6 students would be the actors and crew and I would mentor the whole project. Our principal, Tony Lorbetskie, really likes to think outside the box. He was all for it.

We began script reading the next week. We cast the parts easily because I was already very familiar with each of my students' strengths. We set up a shooting schedule, made committees to design sets and gather costumes, and began rehearsing. We also managed to get another Intermediate student on board, Christina Logan (also a former student), to assist with production design. This is a wonderful way to bridge the Intermediate and Junior divisions, and to promote unity and a team mentality often lacking between the divisions.

After a few weeks (periods 1 and 2 each morning), we finished filming all the scenes. The post-production work was completed by Zach throughout March and April, as he combined music, visual presentation, and dramatic content to make a powerful statement on how we can all work together to save the planet.

I arranged newspaper coverage by the *Georgina Advocate*. A reporter came to the school, photographed the students, and wrote down their names for a story about our movie premiere on May 9, 2007 at the Gem Theatre in Keswick.

Can you imagine the children's excitement as their families and friends gathered at the theatre and *An Environmental Tale* was written up on the marquee? Even the mayor, Robert Grossi, attended our premiere. Zach had written him a letter a few weeks earlier, telling him about our project and how we hoped to make a difference to the community. Our principal and vice-principal, Cheryl Daniel, gave us their valued support by being there too.

We were all elated. The students felt like stars. The project was a success on a number of levels: we used media as a teaching and learning tool that gave students writing, directing, producing, designing, and acting experience; we had a strong environmental message that we felt very passionate about; and we involved the community in a powerful way.

Our next steps include using the movie to educate a larger community of people to make environmental changes. We want green bins in the schools to reduce garbage further. Who knows what else we'll achieve? When you get a creative group of students, parents, and teachers together the sky's the limit! ♥



Photos: Andrea Hertach

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