

Queen Mary ACTION – Taking Care of our Planet!!

Queen Mary students are dedicated to taking care of the environment in so many ways! For example, there are only paper recycling bins in the classroom. Garbage cans have been removed from the classrooms. Any garbage is taken to the hall where students have three options. Because of this, students need to actively think about what they are throwing away and how to sort when disposing of an item: compost, plastics, or the garbage bin.

For many years now Queen Mary Community Elementary has participated in the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup. The older students walk down to the shore to pick up garbage. The younger classes walk around the neighborhood to pick up garbage. Students witness first hand the impact of humans on the environment and are proud of themselves for making the world a cleaner place.

Some more Grade-specific highlights:

Kindergarten:

Every year caterpillars are welcomed into the classes. The students take care of the caterpillars and observe the different lifecycle stages, releasing them outdoors when they become butterflies. Through this experience students build an understanding of lifecycles, and learn about what living things need to be able to survive.

Grade 1:

A community garden plot beside our school is being used to educate students. The Grade 1s have been involved with the Edible Garden Project for the past several years. Three other grades are also taking part this year. Through this project, the students are taught the life cycle of food producing plants and how to tend to a garden for optimal food growth. They get to watch and care for the plants as they grow from seeds to something edible, then harvest and eat what they have grown.

Currently, the Grade 1s are also involved with a campaign to save a 205 year-old tree from being cut down by a developer. They are making posters and will be making a video to send to City Hall to save the tree.

Grade 3:

Students in Grade 3 spend time getting to know features of our local natural environment by spending time learning in those places: walking field trips to local forested areas, beaches, and rivers, and exploring these environments. This first-hand experience helps them develop the understanding of the interconnectedness of living things. Students learn about biomes and various environmental impacts on species. They inquire into how the food web is affected by the loss of a species in a particular environment.

These outings have prompted our Grade 3 students to be stewards of the environment in the area of garbage clean-up. Astounded by how much garbage they have found in these natural spaces, students embark on regular garbage pick-up endeavours, weekly on our own school grounds and in whenever in our local parks when on their for their outdoor learning.

Grade 2:

Every year we receive salmon eggs to raise to fry and then release into nearby streams. The salmon eggs are blessed by our Indigenous Support Workers when they arrive and again when the fry are released. The Grade 2 students monitor and care for the eggs as they grow and change. Students observe the salmon through this part of their lifecycle, and are involved with releasing the salmon into a nearby stream. Students become invested in ensuring their salmon do well in their new ocean environment.

Grade 4:

This year, the Grade 4 students are also participating in the Edible Garden Project. They are learning about the life cycle of food producing plants in this outdoor garden “classroom”.

The students in Grade 4 also learn about how human habits can impact the environment, affecting living things. Students have learned that by 2050 there will be more garbage in the ocean than fish. In COVID times, the students creatively shared this knowledge with other students by decorating their classroom door with information and images to teach others about this issue. Furthermore, the students have actively been collecting garbage around the school every week. After learning about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, students requested we have more garbage cans on the playground. The students also committed to the challenge of having zero-waste lunches.

The class is currently creating an aquaponics garden in the classroom. They are learning that living things are dependent on each other.

Grade 5:

Our Grade 5s take on the responsibility of paper recycling for the school, checking the classroom bins to ensure that only paper goes into the large recycling bins for pick-up.

The students in Division 5 were recently inspired by a documentary created by one of their classmates that highlighted the terrible impact that salmon farming has on our environment. After learning that salmon farming negatively affects many other animal species and human health, the students took action by writing emails to Minister Bernadette Jordan to thank her for listening to Indigenous fishing communities and to advocate for further interventions.

This year the Grade 5s also participated in the “Cool It! Climate Challenge” run by BC Sustainable Energy Association. The students needed to reduce their carbon footprint by pledging to change their daily habits. Changes included re-using leftovers, going meatless once a week, washing laundry in cold water, hang dry clothes, shorter showers, turn down the heat, planting a tree, planting a garden, turning off electronics and lights for an hour, traveling through cleaner alternatives to a car, make crafts from upcycled items, reusing or repairing items. Through our combined efforts they avoided producing 11.6 tonnes of GHGs.

Grade 6:

In Grade 6 students dig deeply into local and global issues throughout the school year, extensively inquiring into climate change. Examining data from around the globe, students learn to interpret and extract information from graphs and charts. The students then create infographics, which they put on display, to educate others.

Grade 7:

In the Grade 7 year, students engage in independent inquiry projects throughout their final term. Their learning is then shared with the rest of the school community during the “IB Exhibition”. Every year students delve into various topics, with several inquiring into local and global environmental issues. Part of the IB requirement is that these students take action based on their learning. These action projects can take on the form of educating others, fundraising for organizations, or actually doing something to create positive change, for example, one student created a vegetable garden in his backyard as a result of his learning, and another an outdoor composting area in their family’s year. Some students have spent weekends volunteering at local agencies that support the homeless, or have visited agencies like The Foundry to learn more about supports for those struggling with mental illness. These experiences are usually transformative for our students, and often inspire them to further pursue career-focused learning and life-style changes.

Indigenous Connections:

In all areas of environmental learning students also learn about Indigenous values and connections to the land. The First Peoples’ Principles of learning are embedded in instruction and guide learning. Teachers work closely with our First Nations Support Worker, incorporating teachings and sharing of Indigenous ways of knowing into lessons.

The QM Green Team:

The Green Team is a club for students of any grade interested in making the world a better place through green initiatives. The team has been running for five years. Prior to COVID they

met once every two weeks and sometimes every week. Unfortunately, COVID protocols has prevented the team from forming this year, but they have done amazing work in prior years.

Over the years, the Green Team has been an educational force in the school. They have taught students how to recycle, and frequently shared “green” tips and advice on the morning announcements and in assemblies. To keep the school engaged, they also created an Earth Day Song and a video on PowToons to showcase what they stood for.

Each year, the Green Team has organized and encouraged students to get to school using more environmentally friendly transportation. For example, the team has hosted “Walk and Wheel to School Challenges” and promoted “Walk or Wheel Wednesdays”. For bike to school week, the team held events like a bike rodeo, and awarded students with prizes for walking or rolling to school.

Our Green Team has also tackled the issue of excess garbage. They hosted litter-less lunch contests for the whole school to participate and took part in daily garbage clean-up around the school. A “plogging” group was created for students to pick up litter and jog weekly after school. Before the removal of garbage cans in the classrooms, the Green Team did a garbage survey of all the classes. They kept the garbage and sorted the garbage to things that could be composted or recycled. They were able to view the habits of the school and target their campaign to their findings. Last year, the team introduced felt marker recycling buckets for the school. The school saved two garbage bags worth of markers from going to the landfill. The Green Team built a lending library at the front of the school for the community to enjoy used books that others may not want anymore.

The team encouraged the community to enjoy and connect with nature. Flowers were planted in boxes outside the windows. Bird and bee boxes were built and placed in the community garden.

The QM Green Team won the 2017 Living City Award. The North Vancouver City gave this honour for the groups leadership in environmental sustainability. Their PowToons video even got them an invitation to City Hall!

The environmental lessons at the school bring an awareness of the relationship between humans and the environment. Students learn the impact they make and how it can affect the environment. The programs develop their sense of responsibility towards the community, the environment, and toward other living things. For some, the education resonates deeper. Students become empowered to take action and create change.

We are very proud of our teachers’ and students’ ongoing commitment to making the world a better place!! Thank you to parents and caregivers for continuing to support your children in their efforts to care for our environment!