



photo by JGI Canada

TEACHING HOPE

THE JANE GOODALL INSTITUTE'S ROOTS & SHOOTS PROGRAM

by Allison Forsythe

Every day, we hear bad news. We hear about unimaginable devastation and poverty in developing countries, the mind-boggling pace of deforestation, and the plight of endangered animal and plant species across the globe. The problems are big. They are scary—and sometimes, even the thought of them is too overwhelming to deal with. So how can we possibly instill the necessary strength in each of our students to make them believe that they—as individuals—can make a difference?

There is help. Through the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), Dr. Goodall has created a youth action program called Roots & Shoots. The program is about positive change. Through it, youth are not only motivated to learn about the issues that face our local and global communities, but they are actually given the tools to design, lead, and implement their own projects to address those issues. The model for Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots incorporates Knowledge, Compassion and Action. The idea is that once you gain knowledge about a topic (local community needs, environmental issues), then you begin to care about it. It's the caring—or compassion—that will lead to action.

There are approximately 370 Roots & Shoots groups in Canada today, and about 70% of them are school-based. The model is flexible and encourages self-directed learning, so teachers are able to adapt it to their own curriculum needs. Generally, groups comprising students in elementary school participate through classroom activities, while those in high school tend to register as an extra-curricular club. Regardless of the age group, the stance of any project is one of hope—that a positive difference can be made.

"I honestly believe that if you surround young people with hopefulness and ways to make things better, it will make kids more optimistic in their lives," explains Abner Lico, the National Program Manager for Roots & Shoots. "It becomes part of their character."

How to get involved

Teachers can register their groups or clubs simply by visiting the Roots & Shoots website and joining the program: (www.RootsandShoots.ca) There is no fee to join Roots & Shoots, and registered members are given access to a wealth of information to inspire groups to take action and help them see their projects through to completion. The main Roots & Shoots toolkit for schools is downloadable, and it contains step-by-step information about how to pull a group together, when and how to meet (which is especially useful for clubs), and how to use the Roots & Shoots model for activities. Members are also connected to the global network of Roots & Shoots groups: groups from around the world post messages and stories about their own projects, which can help spark ideas for your own group and lead to greater global awareness about issues facing communities on the other side of the world. Furthermore, Roots & Shoots also includes national campaigns (complete with fact sheets and tools to help you get involved) that align with the school year. *Planet Relief* is the Roots & Shoots Canada 2010 national forest campaign, which will run through to June 2011.

"You can probably connect Roots & Shoots to what is already going on in your school," explains Emma Roche, the Community Service and Global Outreach Coordinator at Royal St. George's College. "Our school already had an environment

club, so we registered the group with Roots & Shoots. It has been really easy. So far, we have had a fundraiser to sponsor a chimp—which really helped to get the kids interested—and we have monthly environment days. The students in the club come up with the ideas."

Since the program is designed to be youth-driven, most of the ideas for activities and action come directly from the youth, while the teachers take on more of a mentorship role. "Basically, you just need to be the adult," says Meg O'Mahony, a biology teacher with University of Toronto Schools. After having the chance to travel to Uganda with JGI, Meg returned to school determined to start a Roots & Shoots group. She hand-picked the student leaders to help her start it and has provided overall coordination for the group ever since. "Students come to the club with great ideas and passion, but they need a teacher there to help them set deadlines, plan details, and implement their activities. Yes, it takes time to be there, but it is worth it. These kids come to the club at different levels, but they develop a lot of skills along the way. You just need to give them a venue to do these things."

Only if we understand, can we care;

Only if we care, will we help;

Only if we help, shall all be saved.

- Jane Goodall, PhD, DBE

Ingrid Giesinger, a teacher at Loretto Abbey in Toronto who also had the chance to travel to Uganda with JGI, stepped in to moderate her school's environment club and register the group with Roots & Shoots. "The club has used many resources and ideas over the course of the school year," she notes. "We have had an ongoing project to build a Garbage-a-saurus by collecting garbage from one lunch hour and placing it inside a chicken wire structure to help kids visualize how much waste is produced (and therefore create less themselves). For International Toilet Day, we had a bake sale and movie session to inform the school about Third World sanitation. It included a PowerPoint presentation, followed by a showing of *Slumdog Millionaire*, and it was a tremendous success."

Using the Roots & Shoots program in the classroom for younger students can be just as easy as registering an extra-curricular club in high schools. Students can help plant school gardens or visit local farms to learn about land stewardship, hold fundraisers to support community programs, and learn about wildlife and environmental conservation.

Ellen Kessler, a teacher at the Toronto Heschel School, also recommends buying or borrowing Dr. Goodall's books. "By sharing her story with the students in our Grade 3 class last year as they studied animal habitats and activism to protect them," she explains, "our students became more educated about Jane and her work. One little girl from that class, when asked what she wanted to be when she grows up, reported that she will be 'a scientist living in the jungle who helps animals.'"

The student experience

The experience of participating in a Roots & Shoots group can be positively transformational for the students.

"Before Roots & Shoots, I never really thought of myself as someone who would have been this involved," admits Ali Damji, who has been part of Meg's group at University of Toronto Schools and is on the national Roots & Shoots Youth Leadership Council (YLC). "Through the program and the YLC, I've seen myself develop and get more passionate about issues. My advice to other students would be: don't get discouraged. Every little thing you do counts. When you get a large group of youth to participate in a program like this, you don't have to be an expert. You can be anyone, and you can make a difference."



photo by JGI Canada

Brooke Atkinson, who is currently involved with a very active Roots & Shoots group at Carson Graham Secondary School in North Vancouver and is also on the YLC, actually started with Roots & Shoots when she was in the third grade. Over the years, she has participated and led a number of projects, including tree planting and creek clean-ups. “Through Roots & Shoots, I have learned how to be a leader,” she says with confidence. “It has shown me how to stand up and share my voice with other youth around the world.”

Through the program, youth are also encouraged to make connections between their own work and the work being done by other Roots & Shoots members. “When you work in social justice or environmental issues, it can be hard to feel like you are making a big difference as one person,” explains Katie O’Connell, who started her own group with her best friend and is part of the YLC. “But through Roots & Shoots, you

can see the connections. You can see other youth care and see the impacts of smaller projects come together—and since it isn’t issue-based, but is action-based, you can do anything.”

Words of wisdom

JGI recognizes how strongly students relate to Dr. Goodall as a role model. To commemorate Jane’s 50 year anniversary since beginning her research in Africa, Roots & Shoots is running a contest to have groups meet her. Dr. Goodall is also on the road for approximately 300 days of the year, giving lectures. These lectures provide an excellent learning opportunity for all students.

“Take your students to see Jane speak, if you can,” suggests Ingrid. “I know seeing Jane left my students feeling like they can make a difference—that they can be involved and there are solutions. The last thing we want is for our youth to feel unmotivated. They have to have the courage and belief that there is hope for the future, and that is exactly how they walked away from that discussion.”

As with any new project, club, or approach to curriculum, extra time and effort may be needed to put all the pieces in place, but it is well worth it.

“Persist,” says Ellen. “Keep working to integrate your environmental and social justice messages with Jane Goodall’s help. Her people (JGI staff) will help you to elevate the little projects your students can accomplish into a much larger effort to change the world. It’s like sparks of light that are small: only together can they create a huge light. Change the world, one child at a time.”

Quick Links

Browse through the Roots & Shoots information on the JGI website: <http://www.janegoodall.ca/roots-shoots.php>

Read Ingrid’s blog about her trip to Uganda: http://www.travelpod.com/members/i_giesinger

Learn about the Planet Releaf campaign: <http://www.janegoodall.ca/planet-reeleaf/about.html>

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Allison Forsythe comes from a family full of teachers and is currently a freelance writer in Ottawa. She lives with her husband and their two cats, all of whom support her passion for writing and environmental conservation.



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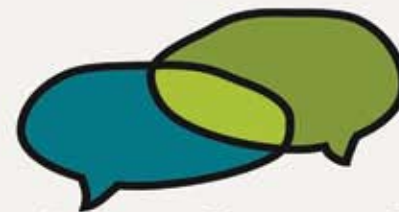
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Q: If you were to draw or tell your story in the style of this hanging, what would it look like?

Q: Why do you think birds are popular symbols and what different meanings do they hold?

Q: What other garments do you know of that are created using many pieces?

Q: How would you represent natural forces such as heat or water?



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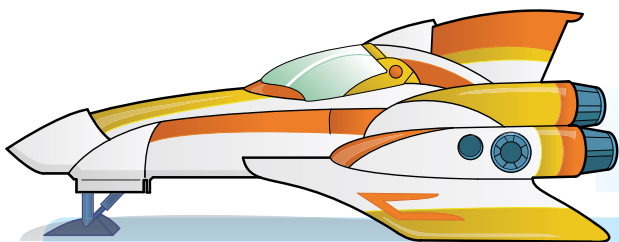
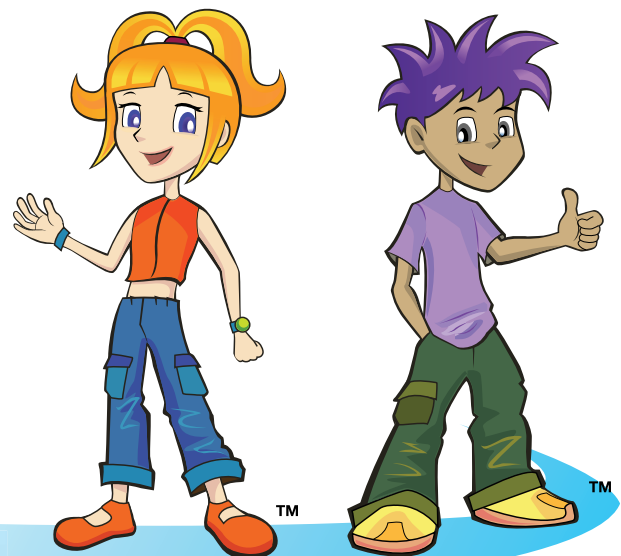
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