

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

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In this article Liz explores how the WWF works alongside schools across the UK to help foster a real culture of sustainability.

Here at WWF we believe that each and every one of us has a responsibility to help children explore the natural world around them. We inspire young people to find out about environments far away, and to understand and embrace the need to care for our planet – along with the species and people that depend on it. We work in some truly spectacular places around the globe – from the steamy tropical rainforests like the Amazon, through dreamy English chalk streams, to the Arctic and Antarctic. In fact, we work on every continent to protect our planet for future generations.

I have worked in the schools and youth team at WWF-UK for 11 years and I am incredibly proud to say that within my role I get to see just how passionate and inspirational young people can be about conservation issues. It is a huge remit, which spans tackling the issue of climate change to protecting endangered species and spaces. Although the challenges often seem huge, it is often the younger generation who have the imagination to visualise the solutions and identify the smaller steps we can all take to help protect our planet.

That is why we created WWF's 'Green Ambassadors' scheme in 2011. This initiative has gone from strength to strength since it began; it empowers young people to have a voice, to lead and to take action on environmental issues. Over 6000 registered primary schools from across the

UK are helping to create a brighter future for our planet and inspiring a whole new generation of sustainability advocates.

The scheme encourages pupils to make environmental changes within their school and their community. For schools that are only just beginning their sustainability journey this can be a huge and daunting mission: we needed something to help and inspire the pupils, which is where our Green Ambassador characters come in. Each character represents an area that WWF looks at to help protect our planet, and each has its own personalities, skills and interests.

- 'Earth' is the team leader and is passionate about global links, caring and considerate of others.
- An expert in buildings and grounds, 'Brick' is solid and dependable, a really a very practical character.



Figure 1: Pupils at the Green Ambassadors 2016 Summit developed team work and communication skills. Photo © Richard Stonehouse/WWF.

- 'Leafy' is our nature and environment expert, and although a rather chilled character likes to question and think differently about things.
- 'Smith', an apple, is enthusiastic in everything, which makes for a great team player. Smith is our food fanatic, always helping pupils to understand how our food choices can affect the planet, and encouraging them to learn about growing food in their school grounds
- As usual, with any team coming together you always have the thrill seeker: meet 'Wheel'. An expert in travel and traffic, Wheel is always coming up with ideas on how to get to and from school more sustainably.
- There is always the joker in the group, this is 'Crush', our waste and recycling guru, who loves to invent ways to use items differently.
- Then there is 'Switch', who is passionate about energy saving. Switch knows a lot about technology and is a natural leader who always has a plan.
- The last of the main characters is 'Tap', an expert on water, who also likes to find out how things work. Tap is hardworking and is the sensible one in the group.

The characters we have created are designed to help pupils identify the key skills they have to offer a team. This approach encourages pupils to develop everyday life skills. These include deciding who is going to lead the team, setting agendas, holding meetings, taking minutes, noting action points and, perhaps more importantly, presentation skills – how do they gain the support of the head teacher, bursar and caretaker to make their green ideas a reality.

Over the last four years, WWF has hosted annual Green Ambassador Awards to showcase the amazing work that our Green Ambassadors undertake within their schools. Many schools tell us about their environmental projects, hoping to become the Green Ambassador School of the year, but we do not stop there, we also shine the light on individual teachers and pupils each year!

Dedicated and hardworking teachers and pupils, who are passionate about the environment, have a chance to be nominated for the Green Ambassador Teacher/Pupil of the Year. In 2016, we hosted a two-day Green Ambassador summit and invited a selection of pupils and teachers from the shortlisted schools to attend. The summit was held in central England, because our 6000 Green Ambassador schools cover the whole of the UK. The pupils took part in a range of outdoor activities aimed at developing



Figure 2: Two of the amazing animal masks made from recycled materials. Photo © Richard Stonehouse/WWF.

their team working and communication skills, building their confidence and belief that just one small action can have a big positive impact (Figure 1).

The pupils took part in a guided walk through nearby woods and created quirky animal masks from a whole host of recycled materials, including plastic bottles, drink cartons, egg boxes and yoghurt pots. By the end of the session, the pupils had created amazing lion, monkey and giraffe masks (Figure 2). In our final session of the day we demonstrated that if we all join together we can make a bigger and greater impact. With the help of a company called Big Beat, we hosted a musical workshop on the theme of 'What a load of junk'. Everyone used recycled materials (such as bike wheel frames, plastic pipes, plastic bottles) to create an amazing musical piece, which helped demonstrate what is possible if we all join together and unite as one. It was amazing to see so many of our Green Ambassador pupils extend their skills over the two days, and I was in awe at how everyone came together to interact and engage with one another as part of the wider Green Ambassadors community.

We encourage our Green Ambassadors to share their stories with others across the UK on our Green Ambassador hub (see web panel). A secure site, the hub allows teachers or pupils to submit their stories to help and inspire others on their journey. There are also online tools available to assist our Green Ambassador schools in their eco activities: from energy surveys to our latest 'Plant2plate campaign', some activities can be carried out in the classroom and/or outdoors.

These activities are easy to use, can be adapted to the age range, link to the curriculum through science, geography, maths and literacy, and include lunchtime or after school activities.

We would love your school to become part of the Green Ambassador community. You can register your school and see your pupils develop into caring, committed and capable sustainability champions.

Editor's note

In 2016, the Eco Committee at my school registered to become Green Ambassadors and, immediately, pupils were very excited by the online resources, the tools and opportunities that the scheme provides. My pupils were so passionate about sustainability that, after a visit from WWF to see their work at school first hand, they were invited to attend the Green Ambassador Summit in Shropshire. Although the pupils did not come first, they won £2500, which they have already ploughed back into their Eco Club to foster the culture of sustainability further. RH

WEB RESOURCES

Register for Green Ambassadors and view the full range of WWF support materials: wwf.org.uk/schools

Liz Rossall is Schools and Youth Officer at WWF-UK, where her main focus is the flagship programme Green Ambassadors, inspiring and empowering young people to help save our beautiful planet (twitter account: @LizRossall1).