

Hudson Valley sites aid learning

Grants to 4 schools let children explore region's landmarks

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The Journal News

To help students retain what they learn, perform better on state tests and enjoy schoolwork more, educators throughout the region are taking advantage of the Hudson Valley's historic and environmental sites to teach science, social studies, English, math and art.

Kindergartners on a recent field trip donned oversized waders, hobbled into the Hudson River and hauled a 30-foot net onto the sandy shore.

"We got two fishes!" shouted Mackenzie Fox of Stony Point, peering into the net.

In the next hour, she and her classmates stroked the skin of a striped bass and fingered the clay-like black mud that was used to make bricks during the Industrial Revolution.

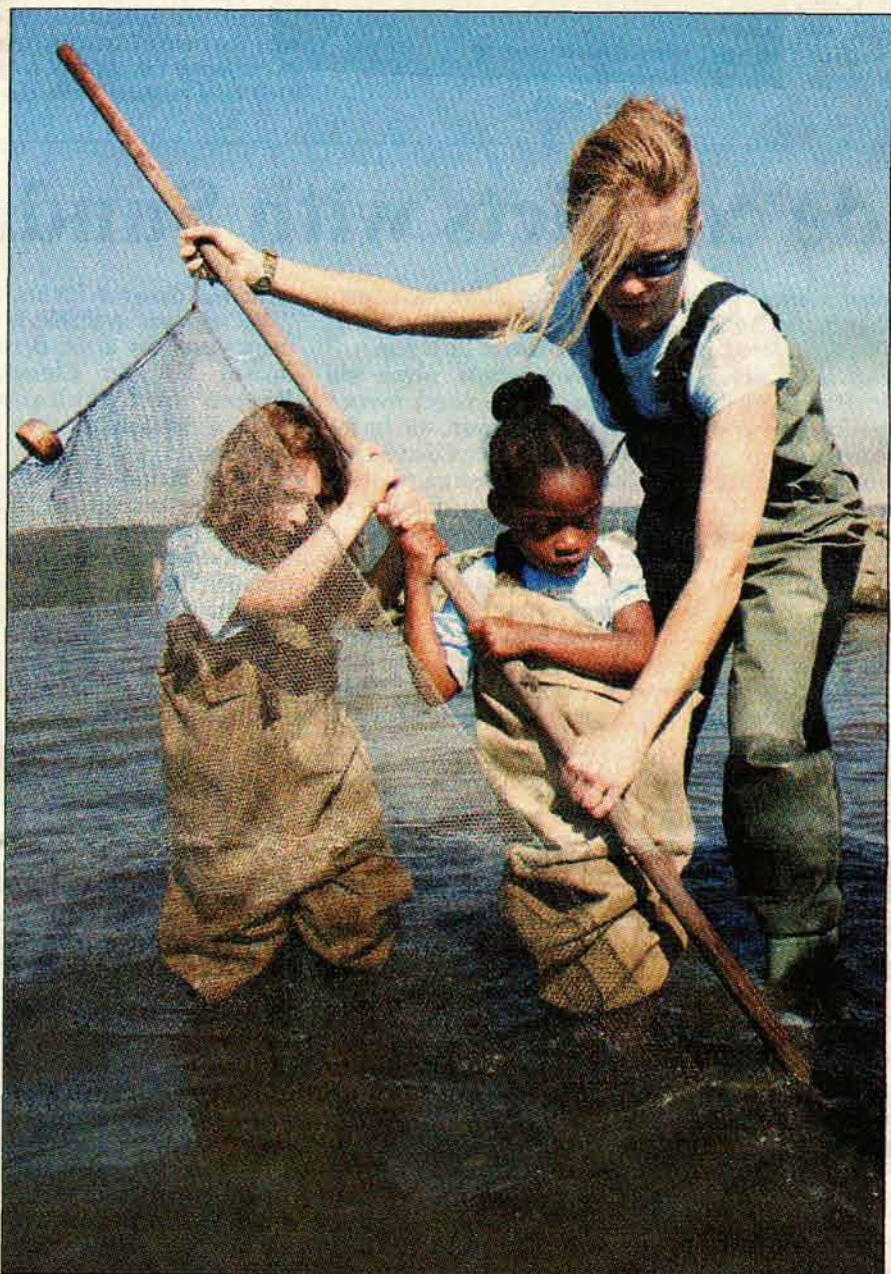
"I learn harder here because this is so fun," said Lea Naisberg of Valley Cottage, 5.

The kindergartners from The River School in Nyack were practicing seining, a netting technique once used by American Indians and other cultures around the world, at the Beczak Environmental Education Center in Yonkers.

For some children, the activity brought them closer to marine life than ever before. Elise Simon of Nyack shrieked and laughed when educator Niall Cytryn cradled a 6-inch eel in his palms. But she mustered the courage to touch it, declaring that it was "very slimy."

"I saw a big eel in ShopRite," said Noah Rosenberg of New City, after telling his friend that the shard of glass they found "shouldn't be here."

The River School was one of four local schools to receive 2004 "Teaching the Hudson Valley"



Photos by Matthew Brown/The Journal News
Cynthia Fowx helps Amy Chanin, left, and Elise Simon hold a pole in place as a net is drawn into shore from the Hudson River last month. The students from The River School in Nyack were learning an American Indian netting technique, called seining, during their visit to the Beczak Environmental Education Center in Yonkers.

Things to do with children

- 1 Visit a waterfront park.** Walk, take photos, draw, write a poem, fish, canoe or kayak.
- 2 Participate in beach cleanups.** Practice math and reading by keeping track of the garbage.
- 3 Visit a historic site or environmental education center.**
- 4 Take a guided walk.**
- 5 Take a train or ferry.** Create a scavenger hunt or bingo cards out of places or things you can find on your trip.
- 6 Start environmentally sound practices** in household routines. Visit: www.dec.state.ny.us/web-site/hudson/youprotect.html.
- 7 Teach financial and social responsibility** by volunteering for or donating to a river organization.



Students touch a white perch they caught while seining in the Hudson River.

Source: Cynthia Fowx, senior educator, Beczak Environmental Education Center

Hudson Valley sites become classes for region's students

RIVER, from 1A

grants to work with local historic and environmental organizations giving children hands-on experiences.

The initiative is sponsored by the National Park Service, the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, Hudson River Valley Greenway, the Hudson River Valley Institute at Marist College, the Hudson River Estuary Program and the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

Among the other grant recipients:

■ Fourth-graders at Lewisboro Elementary School will learn about barter and big business in the economic development of the Hudson Valley.

Students will act out the roles of servants and landowners after visiting the Lyndhurst mansion in Tarrytown, and create a newspaper after interviewing Philipsburg Manor docents playing the roles of landowners, tenant farmers and slaves.

■ At Pequenakonck Elementary School in North Salem, fourth-graders will learn about life in Westchester during the American Revolution, reading from diaries of soldiers and looking at court cases in which residents were tried for treason.

"You're not sure if your neighbors are for the British or the American — the rebel — side," said librarian Noel MacCarry. "Both sides are taking the farmers' crops, taking their cattle.

There's a lot of theft. There's a lot of spying exciting things for kids to learn about, and you don't see that in a textbook."

The activities also will prepare students for state exams, in which they answer questions based on historical documents.

■ Sixth-graders at North Salem Middle School will delve into the artistic expression of three epochs. To start, they will read "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Washington Irving, compare film versions and visit the home of the 19th-century author, which he designed and landscaped himself.

Many schools take similar approaches with regular field trips. On Friday, seventh-graders from Westlake Middle School in Mount Pleasant rode the Commander — a vessel used by the Navy during World War I — to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. For marine ecology, they tested river water for its ability to sustain life. For art, they photographed the river and its bridges, observing light and shadows. And for social studies, they toured West Point.

On last year's trip, seeing weapons from past conflicts made Genya Gurvich and Anthony Angarano think about war differently.

"They showed you an actual tank, and you saw how big it was, and they showed you guns and knives — and you knew how deadly they were," said Genya, 13.

Anthony, also 13, said the exhibit made him realize that war was "much more harsh" than he imagined.

Local attractions

■ Hudson Valley sites and events:

www.hudsonvalley.org;
www.hvnet.com

■ Hudson River museums and historic sites: www.hudsonriver.com/museums.htm

■ Guided tours for walking, biking and boating:
www.hudsonvalleyramble.com

■ Beach cleanup sites:
www.alsnyc.org/nyssites.htm#westchester

■ Parks, preserves and nature centers:
www.fcwc.org/directory/srp.pnc.htm

■ Westchester environmental organizations:
www.fcwc.org/directory/wce.o.htm

■ Westchester park system:
www.westchestergov.com/parks

■ Rockland park system:
www.co.rockland.ny.us/environment/parks.htm

■ New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program and related links: www.harborestuary.org/links.htm

"It made it very clear and easy to see how bad the wars were to fight," he said.

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Matthew Brown/The Journal News

Kindergarten teacher Christine Kiernan chuckles as Emily Burstyn, left, and Mackenzie Fox get suited last month in oversized waders with the help of Cynthia Fowx, a senior educator with the Beczak Environmental Education Center in Yonkers. The students from The River School in Nyack were learning seining.