

Significance of tossing trash into water resonates with kids

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – A bunch of kids sit around a pond with plastic bottles floating on it. It's their fault. Each one thought it would be OK to toss their empty into the water.

"We created this problem, didn't we?" Cindy Wise asks the kindergartners.



Students draw on a water drop to show what water means to them.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

This pond, as it were, is actually a dark blue sheet representing a body of water. The youngsters are in Aimee Rice's class at the Environmental Magnet School. Wise is with the Tahoe Resource Conservation District; part of a Wonders of Water program being taught for the second year in South Shore schools in grades K-6.

With the curriculum grade appropriate and tying into state

requirements, youth this month in Lake Tahoe Unified School District and at Zephyr Cove Elementary are learning about watershed health, water conservation, fish life cycles, food webs, water cycles, water quality and the importance of stewardship of water resources.

“Year after year, concepts and topics become a bit more complex and build upon one another. Ideally, students will have been exposed to several years of different activities, making them much more informed about local and global water and conservation issues,” explained Pete Brumis with TahoeRCD.

The kindergartners in Rice’s class on Tuesday could not have articulated exactly what they were learning, but they quickly figured out their one bottle of litter and their friend’s and their other friend’s adds up to a whole lot more than just one bottle.

“The Earth can be killed,” Bella Munson said of what happens if this sort of thing were to really happen.



Bella Munson

Though that is not likely to be the immediate outcome, Wise said, “Ecosystems can be killed.”

Before tossing the bottles in the “water” a bunch of (paper) animals that might be found in a pond were put into the water. With imaginations going, they were swimming in a pristine body of water.

Once the bottles were tossed in, they were overrun, killed.

Only bottles could be seen.

One by one the students took out their bottle and tossed it into a blue bag – the icon for South Tahoe Refuse’s recycling program. As they plucked the bottles, to the tune of “Mary had a little lamb,” they sing “Garbage should not go in the water, should not go in the water.”

The animals are back. No more muck to contend with.

“This brings their local environment into the classroom. This is where it all begins,” Rice said.