

Okanagan kids share love of water in pictures and win

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Okanagan WaterWise and the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) are pleased to announce the winners of this year's Okanagan WaterWise Challenge as part of Drinking Water Week, being celebrated across B.C., May 20 to 26.

The contest began as part of Canada Water Week events in March and invited Okanagan youth to submit multimedia entries with the theme "Love your water body." Young people were asked to share their story of a special experience around a particular body of water in the Okanagan and the importance of conserving and protecting it. The winners are: Uta Van Ziffle's Grade 2 class from Vernon's Mission Hill Elementary School who submitted a video entitled "We Love Our Water," as well as Christine Richards' Gr.2 class at South Rutland Elementary and Kari Wright's Gr.3 French Immersion class at Ecole Glenmore Elementary for their written and illustrated submissions.

"We received amazing entries from the North, Central and South Okanagan," said Corinne Jackson, OBWB's Communications Director and manager of the Okanagan WaterWise program, noting the level of engagement from teachers was heartening. "We had videos, songs, poetry and drawings. Some made us laugh, some made us actually shed a few tears – they were all incredibly touching." As expected, judging was difficult and extra help was provided by Water Board staff and representatives from the Regional Districts of North Okanagan and Okanagan-Similkameen.

This is Van Ziffle's second win. Last year her Kindergarten class from Cherryville won.

"A lot of things come across a teacher's desk, invitations for various contests, but this is the only one I've entered because it is so relevant. Plus you have fun prizes," laughed Van Ziffle on hearing the news. Both Van Ziffle's and Richard's class have won a two-hour cruise on Okanagan Lake with their classes, thanks to Cruise Okanagan in Vernon and KelownaDinnerCruises.com. Students will head out on a boat charter for an on-the-water classroom experience to learn about the water of the Okanagan.

"Like last year, the contest happens so close to Earth Day when we're looking at ways to look after the earth, so it makes the contest very relevant. And the contest fits so well with our curriculum," Van Ziffle explained.

"We all love going to the beach and playing in the water, boating and fishing. And because we have it so readily available, we don't often recognize what a treasure and precious resource it is. This contest really helped direct our attention to what we can do to take care of it and not just take it for granted."

Richards noted this was her first time entering such a contest, adding she also appreciated that it met the curriculum. "We spent about two weeks talking about the water cycle and because we live by the lake, it made it so relevant. We went to the Okanagan WaterWise website and checked out the videos – which the kids really enjoyed - and other materials. For me, it has always been important to connect to where we live. This was a fabulous opportunity for the kids to connect to where they live and talk about ways to protect it. It also allowed us to explore how they are connected to kids in other parts of the valley – like Vernon and Penticton."

For Wright, whose students were already conscious about conserving energy, the discussion about water has reinforced their efforts and helped them recognize other areas where they can conserve. "I find that they verbalize it a lot more than they did and remind each other," she said, adding that the kids were even looking for ways to conserve paper with their submission.

"Also, because the students were writing about their own experiences, it was very personalized. They were able to see how they could make a difference in their own life right away if they weren't already, and share this information with others."

Wright's class has won a pizza party, and the YMCA of Kelowna's H2O Adventure and Fitness Centre is helping provide pool passes.

"The level of understanding among kids, at such a young age, is incredible," added Jackson, listing off some of their suggestions to protect Okanagan water. Suggestions included washing vehicles at the car wash or at least on the grass to prevent dirty water from entering storm drains. Picking up our pet's poop and not littering so that it doesn't end up in our water. Taking shorter showers and turning off the tap while we soap our hands. Collecting water in rain barrels and rain gardens. Planting gardens that use less water.

"The contest was aimed at connecting kids to the water that they love to play in – Okanagan Lake, Kalamalka Lake, Osoyoos Lake, Coldstream and Mission Creek, and so many other spots. And they get it – they understand. We've got some amazing WaterWise ambassadors in this valley!"

Honourable mentions go out to Donna Tracy's Gr. 2 class from Giant's Head Elementary in Summerland for their video "20 Things We Can Do to Protect Our Lake" and a storyboard submission by Susan Brown's Grade 2/3 class from South Rutland Elementary.

All entries can be found on the Okanagan WaterWise website at www.okwaterwise.ca/challenge.

Special thanks to this year's challenge partners, including Vernon Aquatic Centre, H2O Adventure and Fitness Centre, the City of Penticton Community Centre Pool, Cruise Okanagan, The Executive Boardroom, Casabella Princess Cruises, Berry and Smith Trucking and School District's 22, 23, 53, 67 and 83.

Learn more about Drinking Water Week – events and contests – at www.drinkingwaterweek.org or at www.okwaterwise.ca.

