

Marshall School 2009

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River Quest Essay

In our society today we commonly overlook what is really important in life. We spend our days wondering what we will watch on TV tonight, what foods we will eat, and how will we look in twenty years. However, it isn't until we really sit back and look at our world that we realize what is more important in life. Instead of watching our favorite movie, we could be out in our community providing simple services that would better the city of Duluth. In one of my school's recent field trips we got to glimpse the world from the heart of Duluth, the Saint Louis Bay.

We skimmed across the choppy waters in the Vista Star in the early morning of May 13, 2009. The entire Marshall School sixth grade was there and we all knew we were in for a good time. While on the boat, we were taught the importance of keeping our precious watershed area clean and free of pollutants. We learned just how easy it is to protect our bay thanks to the instruction by experienced professionals. We acquired knowledge of the impact that our everyday activities cause to our water basin, such as simple things like mowing lawns, washing cars and managing waste.

These common activities can actually cause an immense impact on the environment if we aren't careful. For example, we must be very aware of where our grass clippings go after mowing our lawns. We certainly don't want them clogging every storm sewer near our house. The same thing can occur when washing our car. We should wash them on permeable surfaces to make sure that the soap and any other chemicals don't flow into the storm drain and end up in the lake.

We also learned about how to avoid overpopulating invasive species. This is crucial to maintaining the Great Lakes ecosystem. We can do this by checking our boats for different lake creatures. Some of these creatures are harmless while others are parasitic (meaning they take vitality or life force from another creature). These creatures can shorten numbers of original species while invading our lakes with their own kind.

Another topic we covered was waste management. In Duluth we have a large treatment plant called WLSSD (Western Lake Superior Sanitary District) which uses single celled organisms to break down waste. They provide a great service to the community by taking care of all unwanted biodegradable goods and dealing with them in an environmentally friendly way. Here, we learned the importance of decomposition in the material world, and picked tips on how to create less waste with less effect on the environment. We were also reminded not to dispose of waste down toilet bowls.

One very important station showed how the Coast Guard cleans up an oil spill. In recent times this has been a major concern for the public because spilled oil results in the death of fish, plants, and an entire ecosystem. However, a ship isn't the only source that could release oil into the lake. Infact, if a car parked on the street leaks oil it can find its way the lake. You can easily prevent this small problem from happening by maintenance. And that is what I learned on the Saint Louis River Basin adventure.

Now that I have acquired this knowledge, I will use it to the best of my ability. I think that this adventure has been a phenomenal learning experience. It was enjoyable and I gained tons of knowledge from it. No this wasn't textbook knowledge, this is knowledge that I will use in real life to better my community. Thanks to River Quest, I learned much more about the effects of human impact on the Saint Louis River Basin.