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SMC Launches Center for Environmental Literacy A new home for River of Words

By Andrea A. Firth



Untitled 2010 Finalist; Nutchanan Ratchakul, age 10, Bangkok, Thailand, Demonstration School (Primary), Teacher: Pichai Niyomtham

amazing intersection between the environment and art."

To find out more about SMC's new Center for Environmental Literacy go to <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/node/9159>.

To find out more about River of Words Art & Poetry Contest for 2012 (the entry deadline in 12/1/11) go to <http://www.stmarys-ca.edu/river-of-words/art-poetry-contest>.

"A path, unpredictable, habitat, shelter, wildlife, recreation, our life's blood, new life, reflection, need protection, community." What's the connection between these words? These are the responses grade school and high school students gave when asked to define a watershed. The responses were part of River of Words, a nationally acclaimed ecoliteracy program that encourages young people to explore the watersheds where they live and trains educators to guide them in the process. Started in 1995, River of Words is an environmental poetry and visual arts program for students in kindergarten through 12th grade that is now based in thousands of schools in almost all fifty states and several countries throughout the world.

River of Words recently found a new home at Saint Mary's College (SMC) as part of the newly launched Center for Environmental Literacy. The new Center, housed in the Kalmanovitz School of Education at SMC, will explore and promote the study of nature and the arts in Kindergarten through 12th grade education. "The Center will help prepare the next generation of education leaders to address global ecological concerns," says School of Education Dean Phyllis Metcalf-Turner. The Center will also support faculty in other departments within SMC to incorporate environmental issues into their research and the college coursework.

"We need to educate our kids to deal with the world they will face," says Robert Hass, the Berkeley-based former U.S. Poet Laureate and a Saint Mary's College of California alumni. Hass is the co-founder of River of Words with writer and education advocate Pamela Michael. "It's place-based education. Students use their own communities and ecosystems as their source for learning," says Michael, who will also serve as the Director of the new center at SMC.

With the arrival of River of Words, SMC has also become the keeper of the world's largest collection of children's art and poetry amassed from the program's annual international youth poetry and art contest. The contest inspires students to find the nexus between art, science, writing, and the environment, according to Michael, "The work these young students submit represents an



Exploring the Spectacular Underwater World 2010 Finalist; Mok Tsun Ho, age 14, Hong Kong, China, School of Creativity Teacher: Stephanie Yip

Reach the reporter at: andrea@lamorindaweekly.com

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