

How Making Faces Created Value
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Dallas boys and girls learn about the oneness of life and its environment and help clean a local wilderness park.

“OK, everybody, let’s make faces!” Now what child would turn down this invitation? As the members of the Boys and Girls Group eagerly made faces in hand-held mirrors one day, we group coordinators used the opportunity to discuss the oneness of self and environment.

“Make an angry face,” we say. (A hysterical sight.) “What face shows up in the mirror? Now make a happy face. What so you see?”

Making faces into the mirror and noting the accurate reflection provided an entertaining way to explain that our environment reflects our lives. As well as illustrating this point, the exercise blossomed into a lively discussion about nature. A surprising number of children showed a keen awareness of the importance of preserving our natural environment. One child said, “Greedy people kill trees and animals so we can have more buildings and highways and poison the air.”

Not one to miss an opportunity, I asked if anyone would be interested in improving their natural environment. All hands shot up.

Some weeks later, I asked Rebecca Williams, director of the Dallas Nature Center, the only remaining wilderness area in Dallas, if any volunteer opportunities for children were available. She suggested cleaning the trails and helping in the native plant nursery. All the Boys and Girls Group coordinators agreed to the idea, and we scheduled a Sunday outing there.

As with any outside activity, the weather was a threat. With a dismal forecast and heavy clouds looming overhead, 22 boys and girls arrived to clean the trails on the appointed Sunday afternoon.

Armed with gloves and trash bags, we split into groups and hit the trails. Each one used this activity to discover wildflowers, cacti and unusual stones in the creeks and streams. Some of the children ventured close to the Cattail Pond to see where the resident beaver had done his construction.

Two hours later, back at the Visitors Station, the kids regrouped, muddy and smiling, holding up their full trash bags like first-prize trophies. After a picnic lunch and a lot of water, the boys and girls insisted on hiking another one-mile trail.

Who would have thought that making faces in the mirror would lead to creating so much value? We cleaned up our natural environment, had plenty of exercise, created closer friendships with one another, and made a friend in the community.

For me the experience was the embodiment of President Makiguchi’s theory of “right-living in the home, in work, in the community and in nature.” And yes, after everyone was safely home, the bottom fell out and it poured rain.

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