

Lisa D. Cutchin

## Conservation on Canvas – Jr. Duck Stamp Program Testimony

The Jr. Duck Stamp Program, Conservation on Canvas, is an excellent tool for teaching students at all grade levels about science, language arts, mathematics, and the Visual Arts, and for providing a real world scenario which students can positively impact. Just starting out as a new teacher, several years ago I attended a workshop offered by the Patuxent Research Refuge, located just outside Washington, DC. I was looking for lesson plans and materials with curriculum connections across multiple disciplines that would be interesting for my students. I spent a Saturday in January learning about the Jr. Duck Stamp Program and participating in hands on activities that had been designed by the staff at Patuxent Research Refuge. I had no prior knowledge of the Duck Stamp Program and probably would still not know about program if not for attending the workshop. My hope was that I could incorporate the materials in a lesson for the following school year. I was so impressed with the materials and excited about the learning opportunity for my students, I incorporated the lesson in just a few short weeks after attending the program. My third graders created pictures that were submitted to the Maryland Coordinator for the Jr. Duck Stamp competition in mid-March. I have used the Jr. Duck Stamp lesson with my students each year since and continue to share it with other teachers.

I have been teaching at St. John Regional Catholic School (named a National Blue Ribbon School by the US Department of Education, September 15, 2009) for the past 5 years and my students have participated in the Jr. Duck Stamp Competition for 3 of those years. In the spring of 2009, 70 SJRCS third graders participated in the National Judging for the Federal Jr. Duck Stamp Program that was held in Washington, DC. It created a memory for those students, which will be with them for years to come. When those students walked into art class as 4<sup>th</sup> graders recently, the first thing they asked me was, “When are we doing the Jr. Duck Stamp?” Our school is in rural Frederick, Maryland and very close to the city limits. There are farm lands nearby and a pond that attracts migrating water fowl, especially Canada Geese. The geese fly over our playground and our students are very aware of the sights and sounds of these beautiful creatures. I believe our classroom studies, connected to the Jr. Duck Stamp, have significantly raised awareness of these birds, flyways, and migration and the need for land conservation.

My students learn about the Jr. Duck Stamp through materials provided to me by the US Fish and Wildlife Agency. Students begin their study by reading books, watching movies and creating a “Jr. Duck Stamp” journal that includes facts they discover during the research phase of the unit. After conducting some preliminary research, students are asked to select a waterfowl they would like to learn more about. We discuss plagiarism and why it is not ok to copy or take another person’s work. Students use and hone their powers of observation as they work to determine proportion and create an accurate image of their selected waterfowl. At a time when no child will be left behind, this powerful teaching unit connects the various curriculums and provides asks students to planning, make decisions, and use higher order thinking skills.

Armed with information about a waterfowl they have selected, my students begin work on their entry for the State of Maryland Jr. Duck Stamp competition. Every student who submits an entry is given a certificate of participation by the Maryland Jr. Duck Stamp Coordinator. Several students/parents have lent me their Jr. Duck Stamp pictures to bring with me when I speak with you in person. This is a project that families keep and some are even framed to be enjoyed at home. I have also included photographs I have taken of some of my students' Jr. Duck Stamp pictures and included those also.

My students participate in art class once a week for 42 minutes. My hope is during that time, I can expose them to the visual arts, help them make connections between the arts and the real world; and give them an opportunity to experiment with a variety of media and techniques. We are not an art school. My goal is help grow and develop responsible citizens of the United States and the world. The Jr. Duck Stamp Conservation on Canvas program plays an important role in helping me achieve this goal.

As a teacher, I believe the Jr. Duck Stamp Program is an excellent learning opportunity for students at all grade levels. It provides a real world problem (land conservation) that students can actively take a part in improving. Participation in the Jr. Duck Stamp Program at an early age makes connections for the citizens our students will grow to become. (That I have never chosen to smoke, although both my parents did, I attribute this fact to the educational programs I participated in as a 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grader in elementary school in the 1960's. I believe the Jr. Duck Stamp Program will make connections to the environment and land conservation in a similar way for my students.)

What is difficult for me to put into words is the looks on the curious faces of my students as they research and learn about various water fowl and their habitat; the looks of determination as they work hard to capture the likeness of the birds; and the smiles when their entries are finally completed. The Jr. Duck Stamp Lesson Plan is my favorite lesson to teach and based on the feedback from my students, one of their favorites as well. At the start of the current school year, a parent told me that her son was practicing drawing ducks over the summer because he knew (from his sister who had created a Jr. Duck Stamp picture two years ago) that this was the year he would be learning about the Jr. Duck Stamp program and creating a picture for the contest! When I talk with my current 8<sup>th</sup> graders, they have a sense of pride in their participation in the Jr. Duck Stamp Competition.

This past summer I was selected to participate in the National Gallery of Art's Teacher Institute for 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century American Art. I was one of 50 fortunate teachers across our great nation to have this honor. I talked to my fellow educators and was surprised to learn that they did not know about the Conservation on Canvas program. As teachers, we are asked to have our students participate in many contests throughout the school year. It has been my experience that most contests are to benefit the sponsor of the contest. The Jr. Duck Stamp Conservation on Canvas Program the related competition is a significant benefit to the students who participate. I ask you to provide support and continue this worthwhile program.

Thank you.