

## 2. Essay

The idea behind Project S.O.A.R. was originally developed by a small number of girls in the first grade at Columbus School for Girls'. The girls who participated are part of an advanced literacy class and became interested in this program after meeting and working with Ron Hirschi. Ron Hirschi, an environmentalist and children's book author, came to our school on Earth Day for an author visit. Mr. Hirschi needed questions generated from children to use as a springboard for his inquiry research with other scientists on Pihemanu Island also known as Midway Atoll, located in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The focus of their study came from observing the endangerment of the albatross due to pollution in our major oceans and waterways.

Our literacy class uses a community based child-centered inquiry approach to learning. The students studied Bloom's taxonomy of higher level thinking, comprehending and questioning skills. The questions they generated sparked the interest of the adult research team and inspired the creation of Project S.O.A.R., which stands for Save our Albatross Research. These students have continued their interest in the initiative and have furthered their studies. Their work is closely aligned with the mission of the Literacy and Social Responsibility Special Interest Group and the reason for this nomination.

An important goal of Project S.O.A.R. is to help children enjoy learning about our precious resource, water, through creative, innovative and fun literacy activities and experiences. Now, as third graders, a few more students have joined the group. These five students are further expanding the level and impact of the original study through reading, writing and research, while inspiring others to focus on ocean health in an effort to find meaningful solutions to water pollution. The students are studying many species in the natural world and are deepening their understanding of the growing need to help protect their habitats. We had a "live" narration from Yumi Yasutake, a scientist from NOAA (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency), explaining the habitats in Papahānaumokuākea. Because there is no video conferencing capability at his location in the Hawaiian Islands, the students viewed Mr. Yasutake's PowerPoint presentation on a Smart board while they listened to him on a speakerphone. Mr. Hirschi sent us some lyrics he composed to sing with the tune of *Puff, the Magic Dragon*, by Peter, Paul and Mary. After all these years, Mr. Hirschi was able to convince the original songwriter to change the pronunciation of Hanalei to its correct pronunciation which is reflected in the song we sang to Mr. Yasutake.

The project has grown from within our Lower School division community into a global initiative, designed to build understanding, communication, collaboration and partnerships between elementary-aged students and scientists around the world. In an effort to spread the word about critical ocean issues, Fred, a stuffed Monkey, an idea from a kindergarten teacher in Ohio, is sent along with the group's journal. Fred wears the leg band of a deceased albatross on a necklace, a gift from Ron Hirschi and the United States Fish and Wildlife service, and helps explain to children in other countries about our shared responsibility to be better stewards of our environment, especially our waterways. This serves as a reminder in the words of Mr. Hirschi, "to open eyes, hearts, and minds to the tragic loss of life in our oceans." The girls have sent Fred to Australia and are now readying a cousin of Fred's to travel to Israel. Because of the

outpouring of positive responses to Fred's travels, several "cousins" of Fred have journeyed from Washington State to Hawaii, Ohio, Australia, England, Switzerland, and South Africa. After our Israel package is ready to go, we will be sending more friends of Fred to the Dominican Republic. Journals travel with Fred which give background information on his previous adventures. Students are encouraged to add their thoughts and experiences as well as souvenirs. Then, Fred is passed forward to his next destination. There are now 52 friends of Fred's traveling across the globe with a shared purpose in having students become more environmentally aware and responsible.

The students are learning more than environmental stewardship. They are learning research skills as part of their exploration of many of the species of animal, birds and insects that share planet Earth with humans including those living in the countries to which we will be communicating. We utilize group writing experiences to collect our information, plan, organize our thoughts and then send our journal on. Our pen pal school in Israel is an example of this process which is currently underway. The students will broaden their knowledge of note taking and summarizing, as well as informative, exploratory and persuasive writing skills. The next country to receive Fred from us after Israel will be the Dominican Republic. The children will then be comparing and contrasting the cultures of the students in Israel, the Dominican Republic and Ohio. This will deepen their inferential comprehension skills plus their appreciation and understanding of the differing availability of and uses for clean water. The relationship with the students in other lands will also naturally foster service learning and character education. Specifically, the girls will be sending gently used and desperately needed school supplies to the school in the Dominican Republic.

Clearly, the breadth and depth of the S.O.A.R. project matches every aspect of your organization's purpose. Through our community of inquiry approach to learning including community based reading, writing and research activities and experiences, this group of five girls has touched so many lives across our planet. The students have been immersed in learning and teaching others about our natural world. They have become leaders within their own third grade classrooms and our school community, as well as throughout schools in numerous countries of the world, deepening and spreading their respect and understanding of diverse cultures. Each of the students has shown leadership by modeling civic, social, and environmental engagement. They are fostering their own social, emotional, and academic growth as well as this growth in others, by sharing their learning with others locally and fostering community service.

It is with admiration and pride that I nominate the advanced literacy group from Columbus School for Girls who have initiated Project S.O.A.R. for the Literacy and Service Recognition Award. I sincerely appreciate your consideration on their behalf.

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