

Pine Point School

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Service Learning Highlight



-decoy ibex



-decoy marmot

Service Learning Project Spotlight: Animal Enhancement Toys

-students construct toys for snow leopards at [Roger Williams Park Zoo](#)
 -curriculum links: Animal habits and feeding behaviors, art skills, research skills, presentations skills

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Since 2002, the 3rd grade has been working in conjunction with the zoo in order to create edible paper animals that are used each fall as decoy prey for [snow leopards](#). In the classroom students study the animals that would be found in the snow leopard and omnivorous moon bear (also known as Himalayan or Asian black bears)habitat. Both animals are endangered and live in the zoo's Marco Polo Trail, an exhibit featuring species from Asia. In art class the students applied layers of papier-mâché made from paper bags, flour, water, and wheat paste to frames made from paper towel rolls, masking tape and balloons. Once the mâché dries the balloons are popped and removed. The next step is for students to paint the animals as realistically as possible using a minimal amount of non-toxic tempra paint. They shred paper bags to create the look of fur. The challenge, says art teacher Maria Iacoi, "is how to build a skeleton of something with such little support and make it lifelike at the end."

Once the animals are complete, Zoo staff members stuff them with beef, lamb, fruits, and other tasty treats for the animals. The culmination of the project is when the 3rd grade travels to the zoo before visiting hours in order to witness the first morning feeding. Snow leopards hunt, pounce, and devour the paper animals.

Papier-Mâché Prey Makes for a Rousing Day Enriching the Lives of Our Animals

Zookeepers at Roger Williams Park Zoo, and at other zoos around the country, know that in order to keep an animal truly "healthy," they need to provide it with some mental



exercise, as well as keeping their bodies in tune physically.



-snow leopards, photo courtesy of RWPZoo

To do this, zookeepers use "Animal Enrichment" activities. Animal enrichment involves a change in an animal's normal environment or activities to keep it mentally and physically challenged, allowing the animal to exercise its natural tendencies and instincts, such as hunting.

Recently, zookeepers at RWPZoo treated the snow leopards to an exciting enrichment activity with the help of third graders from the Pine Point School in Stonington, CT. The students all worked very hard to help the snow leopards have a very exciting day at the zoo.

The class researched the snow leopards to find out what they would eat in the Himalayan Highlands. The class then made papier-mâché animals that a snow leopard would eat including an ibex, a hare and a marmot.

After the snow leopards used their keen sense of smell to identify some yummy bone shanks inside the papier-mâché animals, the leopards began to tear the animals apart.

This was a great collaboration between Pine Point School, the RWPZoo's animal care staff, and the RWPZoo's Education Department.
(printed with permission from Roger Williams Park Zoo)

All time favorite teaching experience - a reflection from Mary Rafferty, Pine Point teacher and girls' sports coach for over 20 years

After 20 years I feel very fortunate to report that I have had many memorable, moving, masterful, mischievous, and sometimes misguided moments in teaching. Of course, after 20 years, I can't really remember many of them! A very recent experience, however, was also one of my most favorite.



-2004 3rd Grade Class with paper animals

In 2002, after a search for a meaningful, authentic (and all those other appropriate adjectives) service learning project, David Smith found the Roger Williams Zoo for the third grade. The project was filled with curiosity, connections, and creativity, and was so appropriate for the age. Two aspects of the project made it a favorite. First, was the sense of collaboration that it took to complete the project. While we had a great time brainstorming and then watching Maria create the "toys" with the kids the first year, it was an even greater learning experience when Laurie and I (and current parent Susan Maguire) attempted to repeat the creations the second year. At the same time we had kids working in small groups researching snow leopards, we had Chris Hurtgen helping Laurie learn how to use the digital camera, and "real" zookeepers teaching us about keeping animals happy at the zoo. Second, was the absolute thrill of seeing the "enhancement toys" in place at the zoo. I still get a little choked up when I recall rounding the corner at the zoo and coming upon the snow leopard habitat with "our" animals perched on rocky cliffs. It was absolutely joyful to watch the faces of the third graders as they spotted their animals and stood curiously as the real snow leopards

approached, (and later destroyed), the "toys".

Did you say favorite teaching or learning experience? Isn't it great when both happen at the same time?

Roger Williams Park Zoo has received accolades from all over the country for its conservation and education efforts as well as its entertainment value. The Zoo is home to hundreds of rare and fascinating animals from around the world including polar bears, snow leopards, moon bears, giraffes and elephants all in naturalistic settings. The zoo's population numbers over 1000 animals, with some 139 different species on display at any given time. Awareness and appreciation of wildlife serve as major goals of Roger Williams Park Zoo. Zoo staff currently perform conservation fieldwork around the world with many endangered species including the black howler monkeys of Belize, tree kangaroos of Papua, New Guinea and the American Burying Beetle. (from <http://www.rogerwilliamsparkzoo.org>)

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