

In the heat of late July, students in Tom Murphy's Learn-n-Serve Environmental Anthropology Field (LEAF) School teamed up with Service Education Adventure (SEA) in a 3-day action-packed eco-voyage that allowed students the opportunity to explore the beautiful Sucia and Jones Islands, all while putting our hands together in working towards a more sustainable community.

The adventure began once we lifted anchor from Cap Sante Boat Haven in Anacortes, but in our hearts, the trip never quite came to an end.

As a student in the LEAF school, I am reminded of this incredible voyage every time I see a hazy, fire-orange sunset, or feel waves cut through water against the hull of a boat. There is nothing quite like standing on deck of the *Indigo* and feeling the Puget Sound winds brush against your face as you cruise along the Salish Sea. With breathtaking views of Mt. Rainier and Mt. Baker to the sides of me, I continued to feel captivated by the endless stream of distant Evergreens and the great blue Puget Sound, that so many plant and animal species call their home. The experience was truly one of a lifetime.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in his essay, *Nature*, that "all natural objects make a kindred impression when the mind is open to their influence." Aboard SEA's 65-foot vessel, the *Indigo*, one is able to immerse in nature and develop a greater relationship and appreciation for the land and the sea, all while learning more about the natural history of the Sound and about the many different ecosystems that are supported by it.

Setting up camp right on the beach of Shallow bay, my group's tent was close enough that I could feel the rhythmic tide creeping in and out of the driftwood-covered beach. In teams, we cooked fresh and organic meals every night and enjoyed the blissful company of a camp fire afterwards. We spent our days in the sunshine, helping Washington State Parks complete a variety of maintenance tasks, such as trail building on Jones Island and helping to install sustainable decomposing bathrooms. After a hard day's work, we continued to explore, by climbing caves on Sucia Island or night hiking upwards toward the bluffs, where I could feel the illumination of the moon as it lit up dozens of boats parked in the bay for the night.

We learned that Sucia Island once served the Lummi Indians in their seal hunting days, and that native peoples surrounding the Salish Sea migrated each season to seek out a particular food source. As students, we were challenged to learn more about the culture of Salish peoples and how they have shaped the history of the island and landscape. Along with running watershed education stations aboard the *Indigo*, we were encouraged in our studies and observations to look at sustainable and ethically responsible ways for current land management.

Our eco-voyage with SEA led not only to meaningful education experiences on the water, but it allowed my peers and me to build a relationship and gain further appreciation for the work that Washington State Parks performs.

Thousands of visitors come to the great Northwest every year because they are drawn to its serenity and beauty. As students having the opportunity to do hands-on work and serve in the surroundings of our glorious state parks, we were able to be a part of helping to preserve and maintain the islands for future generations.

This style of hands-on learning in the LEAF school in our eco-voyage with SEA presented my peers and me with a sense that the education we received through service and watershed education was transformational. We allowed the power of nature to transcend our spirits and deepen our understanding of our own relationship with the beautiful Northwest. We packed up for the weekend feeling not only inspired, but feeling like we are truly part of something bigger than ourselves, and one with the land and the Salish Sea.

Valerie Topacio