

[From Spring 1996]

## **Legacy**

*The following was written by a group of students describing their innovative learning experience.*

The Legacy Program at Northampton High School is a tenth-grade program that consists of three classes: Biology, English 10 and Eastern Shore Studies. We also have three teachers who work together with us as a team. The Legacy class combines second, third and fourth block. It starts at 10:00 a.m. and lasts until the end of the school day at 3:00 p.m. Legacy is a hands-on class that is a lot of fun and a lot of work. What we do in Legacy is nothing like school. Our day is not sitting at a desk and listening to a teacher talk until our ears fall off. It is kind of like a family. You learn to trust your classmates and depend on them. It's a good feeling.

The most interesting thing about the Legacy class this year is that we leave school every day and go to the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge where we have our class.

We get on a school bus every day at ten o'clock. It is a real school bus, because we do all kinds of school work as we ride. We study grammar, we write, we read and we talk about things with our teachers. On the way home every day, we write about different things in our journals. We also do SOL sheets, which are pretty hard. SOLs are Standards of Learning, which is the stuff the state says you have to learn in each class. What we have to do every day is write up an SOL sheet that shows how something we have done satisfies one of the SOLs. We have to do one SOL sheet for each class every day. That is fifteen a week.

Our classroom at the Wildlife Refuge is kind of like a museum. It is full of interesting things, like skeletons, shells, animals' skins, decoys, computers and a lot of other stuff. It is called the Environmental Education Center. It's also a laboratory with microscopes, aquariums and other equipment. Usually we sit in a circle on the carpeted floor and Mr. Coburn, Mr. McCarter and Mr. Bonniwell take turns talking about different things. But they do not usually talk for very long because you really cannot learn very much by listening to somebody talk, which is kind of funny, because that is about all we do in our regular classes.

We take a walk almost every day. We have to observe things, which sounds easy, but it isn't.

We have to write about what we observe. We also stop and talk about what we find. One day we examined a deer skeleton, another day it was the many different living things in one square foot of marsh. Last week we found two raccoons sleeping inside a hollow tree. Sometimes we split up and go sit some place by ourselves for fifteen or twenty minutes and write in our journals about what we see, hear, or think. At first we didn't think we would like that, but it's pretty cool. We also do work at the Refuge. Last week we dug up small

cedar trees and replanted them around an observation blind for looking at ducks and geese. We will do a lot more projects like this. It was fun. Mr. Jimmy Kenyon, the Refuge's Educational Coordinator, comes to our classroom and talks to us about different things.

Another thing we will be doing in Legacy this year is building boats. Each student will build a 16-foot plywood canoe. Mr. Sherm Stairs, the Refuge Manager, has let us use a big shop near our classroom to build our boats. The Virginia Environmental Endowment Fund has given us a grant that will pay for most of the building supplies. When the boats are finished, we will use them to do water-monitoring projects and other outdoor Biology experiments. We will start building the boats in March.

We think Legacy is a fun class, but it is also very challenging. The teachers are great. They are very nice, but they are also pushing us to do more, learn more and solve problems on our own. We get a lot of freedom. We get to do things other students do not. We have learned a lot by coming to the Refuge. In our regular classes we do not experience half of what we do down here. This is a better way to learn. We think Legacy is a wonderful class and we are very happy to have the opportunity to be a part of it.

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