

The Somaiya Vidyavihar Students Make Friends With the Humble Trees This World Environment Day 2024

2023 broke all records, turning out to be the hottest year in history. Deforestation is on a rapid rise, and if not stopped now, by 2030, just 10% of the forests will remain in the world. Wildlife populations have declined by nearly 69% since 1970. About 40% of the world's land is degraded. By 2050, an estimated 75% of the global population will experience the effects of drought.

Did these figures shock you? What's more shocking is that these are just some of the many burning environmental issues right now. While the specific numbers may have changed over time, these problems have been making headlines and demanded urgent attention for years. That's why, since 1973, the United Nations has been encouraging millions of people from governments, businesses, civil society, and educational institutions to celebrate World Environment Day every year on June 5.

In line with this year's theme, "Our Land, Our Future. We are #GenerationRestoration", Somaiya Vidyavihar took the initiative to make students realise their role in restoring and protecting Mother Earth. This time, the learning was not within the four walls of their classrooms—we brought them outdoors for the adventure of a lifetime!

Leveraging the Power of Experiential Learning: Tree Treasure Hunt and Guided Tree Walk

Trees are one of the most essential components of the environment. Even though children learn about them in textbooks, no one goes out in nature to interact with them. The Somaiya Center for Experiential Learning (SCEL) team devised an innovative way to educate the students about their leafy neighbours: Tree Treasure Hunt and Guided Tree Walk. The goal was to create a unique, immersive, and fun experience that makes students curious, think critically, and, most importantly, take action within their capabilities.

The rules of the game were simple. The 50 participants were divided into small groups. Each group was given a printed treasure hunt map and a set of puzzles, riddles, and clues that led them to different trees on the Somaiya Vidyavihar campus. The enthusiastic young explorers put the detective's hat on and set on a mission to befriend the trees!

Five Valuable Learnings About Trees on the Way

While enjoying the treasure hunt, the students also imbibed a wealth of knowledge. Here are five lessons every student took home this World Environment Day:

Lesson 1: Connecting with nature

Each clue in the treasure hunt was designed to give the students an engaging sensory experience. They had to feel the texture of the barks, smell the fragrant flowers, observe the different leaf shapes, and even crush and taste them for their unique scents and flavours. The close interactions with the trees allowed them to connect with nature. It made them understand and appreciate the rich botanical diversity on their campus.

Lesson 2: Understanding native trees vs. exotic trees

Throughout the treasure hunt, the students learned to differentiate between native and exotic trees. A crucial takeaway was that planting native trees is more beneficial than exotic varieties for various reasons. Native trees help the ecosystem thrive by providing shelter and food to the local wildlife. They also have better chances of survival and need minimal maintenance. Exotic trees, on the other hand, can disrupt local ecosystems and pose threats to native flora and fauna.

Lesson 3: Exploring environmental challenges

The primary goal of the activity was to enlighten students about present-day environmental challenges. One of the clues was hidden in a news article headlined “300-year-old tree in Santacruz axed for metro 2B.” The students had to identify and locate the same tree species on the campus. Here, the students got a glimpse into the environmental challenges of urban development and learnt the importance of preserving ancient trees.

Lesson 4: Learning the significance of trees

After the treasure hunt, the SCEL team held the Guided Tree Walk, revealing answers to all clues and explaining the ecological, medicinal, cultural, historical, and religious importance of all the trees. They discussed the dangling inflorescences of the Fishtail Palm tree, the spiritual significance of the Cannonball or Nagalinga tree for Hindus, and the sacred value of the Peepal tree, among many others.

Lesson 5: Participating in environmental goals

The SCEL team explained the students’ role in the global movement to restore and protect the environment. They inspired everyone to start doing their bit for a greener, healthier, and more sustainable future for the current and forthcoming generations.

In the end, all 50 students joined hands and pledged to deepen their understanding of the environment, embrace responsibility, actively work to preserve our planet, and motivate others to do the same.

Significance of Experiential Learning for Students Today

Experiential learning is a teaching methodology that involves hands-on participation, group work, discussions, and practical application of knowledge outside the classroom. It allows students to develop various skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, leadership, collaboration, communication, empathy, and self-awareness. All in all, it prepares students for life!

The Somaiya Center for Experiential Learning (SCEL) was established in 2014 to provide immersive learning experiences in Environmental Sustainability and Heritage Conservation.

Through innovative initiatives, it is nurturing the current generation of students to take steps forward in saving planet Earth.