

**Peart, K.N. (1995, April 7). [Green Teens Get Results](#). Scholastic Update, pp. 14-16.**

## OVERVIEW

Young people are leading the way in helping to protect the environment. In town after town, teens are becoming more aware of the dangers facing the environment and are taking steps to protect it. The following three examples cite instances in which teens have played an integral part in defending the environment: from planting trees to saving lakes to taking on a large corporation.

### NO REFUSE

When [Browning-Ferris Industries](#) (BFI) made plans to build a garbage plant in Titusville, Alabama, they did not expect much resistance. However, when construction began, community activists who were worried about air pollution from the garbage plant organized protest marches. The protesters claimed they were victims of "environmental racism," the practice of placing most garbage and toxic waste sites in minority communities. The Titusville community is mostly poor, elderly, and black. BFI claimed that race was never a factor in its decision. A lawsuit stalled the opening of the facility, but did not halt construction.

At this point, teens from Titusville and neighboring communities rallied to the cause. "The elderly people needed our help...we didn't want the same thing to happen to other black communities," said Olly Taal, 18. In 1993, when the plant was built and ready to open, Taal and other teens organized a march through the streets of Birmingham to City Hall. When the teens ignored police requests to stop, Taal and 13 others were arrested. Newspaper accounts of the event united Birmingham against the plant. The city agreed to buy the facility and BFI agreed to leave.

### SIGNS OF LIFE

Members of the [Lake Park High School Earth Club](#) in Roselle, Illinois, spend Saturday mornings at the shores of Goose Lake, a neighborhood pond that was nearly dead three years ago. The club's goal is to produce the area's first nature sanctuary.

Members are already seeing results from their work. "When we started the pond was disgusting and bare," says Katharine Pionke, 17. "The water was thick with waste and there was a big fish kill-off...Now we're beginning to see some evidence of wildlife." After Goose Lake is restored, the club will move on to four other ponds in the area. Student members of the club raise most of their money by recycling cans and selling bird feeders. They also receive grants from the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#).

## GREENSPEAK

In Boston, Massachusetts, kids between the ages of 12 to 18 have the latest news about the environment. Twenty-four students from eight inner-city high schools make up the staff of [Greenspeak](#), a newspaper of kid-friendly articles about the environment. Greenspeak has become a popular tool in improving reading, science, and problem-solving skills of its staff, and it is often used as a teaching tool for younger students. The eight-page paper is published five times a year and covers topics such as plants, water, recycling, energy, endangered species, wildlife, and the weather. The newspaper now reaches 4,000 students in more than 50 of Boston's 80 public elementary schools.

"I wanted to help younger kids learn about the environment and to value it more," says Margaret Pham, 16. "...The best thing is visiting a classroom and seeing the excited look on the fifth-graders' faces when the teacher passes out Greenspeak." Project organizer Elizabeth Gilmore says that staff members also serve as role models. "Younger students see that older students care about them and see, by example, that education and community involvement are very important," she says.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What do you think of the programs and efforts described here?
- What other types of programs do you think would help older kids teach younger kids about the environment?

## IMPLICATIONS

- It is important to provide environmental education in schools so that young people gain an awareness of the dangers facing the environment at an early age.

- Teens can really make a difference in conserving the environment. Youth groups and schools should organize environmental programs so that young people can immediately see the difference they make.

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