



Youth spread message of lake's plight

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On the shores of Sutton's Willow Beach lies a dead girl, but people walk over her without a second look.

It's part of a two-minute film that captures the short life of a fish in the Lake Simcoe watershed.

Using human actors and voice-overs, students of the We Are Saving The Environment (W.A.S.T.E) Film School personify the life of a fish and explore the impacts of overgrown weeds, excessive algae and choking amounts of phosphorus and sulphur in the watershed.



Editor Bernard Dobbs works the camera as production crew members Ariel Whalen (from left), 18, of Toronto, Tess McDonald, 17, of Orangeville, Nicole Kwapis, 17, of Newmarket, Monika Burchert, 15, of Richmond Hill and Erin Blanchard of Hawkley Valley rehearse at the W.A.S.T.E. Film School.

They've learned the cold-water fishery in Lake Simcoe is not sustainable and now they're trying to spread that message.

"It's a powerful film because people react to the person, just as if she was a fish," film student Erin Blanchard, 17, said. "We hope the next generation will look back and start to ask questions."

At the end of the film, each member of the student crew asks a question to which the fish-girl responds, "I don't know".

The W.A.S.T.E film school, hosted by the Ladies of the Lake, Windfall Ecology Centre and Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Area, is a mobile, solar-powered studio for youth who live on the Lake Simcoe watershed, offering classes in Newmarket, Georgina, Barrie and Orillia.

"The lake is our focal point. We all need the lake," school co-founder Hilary Van Welter said. "The lake is a mirror of neglect."

Although the films focus on the environment, the school teaches students to look at the broader meaning.

"The environment isn't just about the physical environment; it's about the world around you," Ms Van Welter said. "We want to save the environment, but we have to look at our relationship to it."

More than 70 students will spend two weeks exploring local environment, history and geography, developing story lines, filming and editing their own movies, Ms Van Welter said.

"The program is to open their eyes to current realities of the lake," she said. "The students use their own concepts and ideas to see new possibilities."

Students will also have the opportunity to profile their films at school and share with their peers the issues faced by the watershed.

"They become the leaders who will challenge the current thinking," Ms Van Welter said. "Teens are vocal and open and have something to say. Film is a great and loud way to share."

All the films, with original scripts and sound tracks, will be featured in the W.A.S.T.E Film Festival in early October, followed by an international debut of the films online, where viewers can cast votes for their favourites.

"There is a lot of waiting in the film process for such a short result," student Nicole Kwapis, 17, said. "But it's interesting to see how many things and people are affected by the lake."

For more information, visit <http://www.wastefilms.ca/>