

The Berkshire Eagle

Unbottled education

Students fundraise for clean water projects in West Africa

By Jenn Smith
Berkshire Eagle Staff

FLORIDA — Gabriel Abbott Memorial School is pumped about having safe, clean water in the world.

For the past month, all 116 youngsters from pre-kindergarten through Grade 8 have participated in a service-learning program about the worldwide water crisis, focusing on the efforts of the BARKA Foundation and the need for clean water in West Africa.

And next Friday, March 20, their efforts will culminate with "Water, Water Everywhere (But Not a Drop to Drink)," an evening celebrating West African food and music, geography and water. It will also include an art auction, with proceeds to benefit the construction of a clean water well in Burkina Faso, West Africa.

"For us teachers, it's one of those things where the more we know, the more the kids know, and the more they want to learn," said Lori Austin, a fourth-grade teacher, who was inspired by a similar project done by third-graders at Sullivan

If you go ...

What: "Water, Water Everywhere (But Not a Drop to Drink)," an evening of student prepared West African music and food, presentations and an art auction to benefit clean and safe water projects in Burkina Faso, West Africa.

When: 5:30 to 7 p.m. Friday, March 20

Where: Gabriel Abbott School, 56 North County Road, Florida.

Information: (413) 664-6023



Elementary School in North Adams.

Austin is coordinating the program with members of the Student Conservation Association (SCA) Massachusetts Parks AmeriCorps.

"A lot of this has been really cool for us because we didn't know the extent of the water crisis," said SCA volunteer Laurie Terry.

Once a week, she and her fellow interns Aja

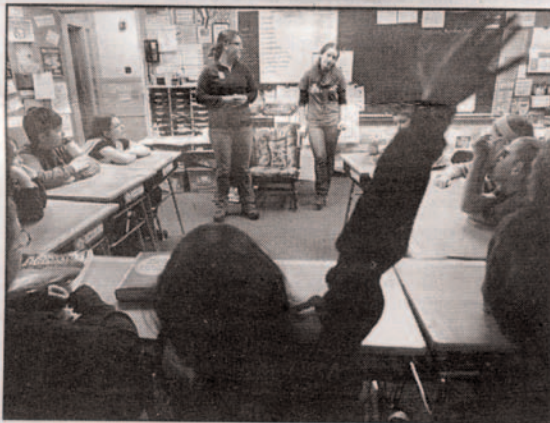
Mathews and Lindsey Campana visit each grade to help teach age-appropriate lessons, from reading African folktales to preschoolers and creating water filtration systems with third-graders, to helping the middle school students make posters, PowerPoint presentations, even a documentary film with music.

"I think it's been a real eye-opener for the kids," Terry said. "You can see them thinking and they ask a lot of questions."

On Wednesday, Austin's fourth-grade students drew posters for a "bottled water challenge" they'll be conducting next Friday night. They will see whether people can tell the difference between bottled and tap water in a taste test.

They also learned about how when people drink bottled water, they're consuming more than just the liquid. "It takes more water to make a bottle of water than what's actually in the bottle," explained student Makenzie Wright.

WATER, continued on B3



Darren Vanden Berge / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Laurie Terry, left, and Aja Mathews speak to Gabriel Abbott Memorial School fourth-graders in preparation for a fundraiser to help raise money for clean water projects in West Africa.

Students fundraise for water

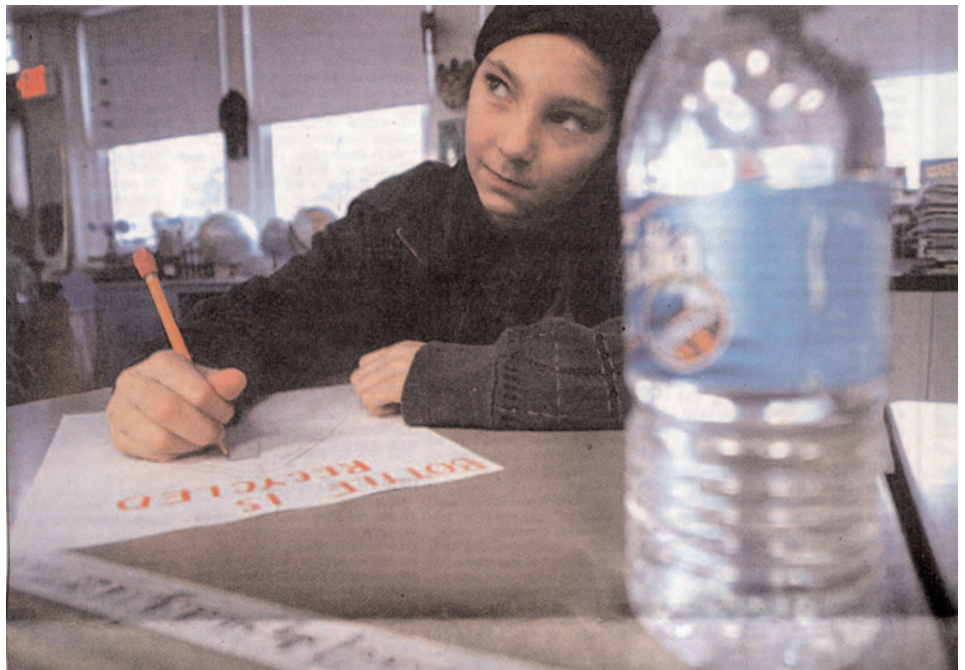
WATER from B1

Wright.

While tap water mostly involves a filtration plant and the process of turning on a faucet, bottled water involves tapping a source, printing paper or plastic labels, creating bottles, filling and distributing and marketing them.

"I really hope that people will start to save water, try to make it clean for the environment, and use reusable water bottles," said

In addition to the March 20 event, which will be recorded and broadcast by Northern Berkshire Community Television, students will be making a video for YouTube about water conservation. Teacher Lori Austin will also give all the curriculum and lesson plans to the BARKA Foundation to be adapted by other schools.



Miranda Wissman, a fourth grader at Gabriel Abbott Memorial School in Florida, works on a project in preparation for a fundraiser to help raise money and awareness for clean water projects in West Africa.