Veteran teacher Elizabeth “Libby” Sibert is passionate about Texas children and Texas wildlife. “I love teaching—it’s my calling and my passion—and I love animals, especially Texas wildlife,” said Sibert, who teaches first grade at Barbara Jordan Elementary School in Odessa. “If I can share the joy that I get from wildlife with my students, then they can pass it along to the people in their lives including their children someday.”

Engaging students in the outside world has been a hallmark of Sibert’s career since she entered her first classroom 32 years ago. “In the beginning, field trips were the norm,” said Sibert. “With today’s budget restrictions, we have to bring experiences to the school instead of taking children to the experiences.”

The opportunity to bring the outdoors into her classroom was one of the many reasons Sibert was excited to discover TWA’s Conservation Legacy programs. She attended a workshop at the Region 18 Education Center in Midland about three years ago. “The TWA education staff was so passionate about the land and the learning,” said Sibert. “We used Discovery Trunks, which were full of things to see and touch. It was so much fun that I fell in love with the program right there.”

Since then, she’s attended two L.A.N.D.S. Outreach Teacher Workshops. “They’re perfect—just absolutely perfect,” Sibert said. In addition, she’s hosted the West Texas L.A.N.D.S. Educator in her classroom twice a year since finding the program, and she’s used the Discovery Trunks to teach a variety of topics. So far, her classes have completed: “Birds of a Feather,” “Skulls and Skins,” “Investigating Life Cycles” and most recently “Let’s Talk Turkey.”

“With the hands-on activities, the kids learn by doing,” Sibert said. “They won’t remember ditto sheets or movies, but they’ll remember mimicking birds’ beaks with tools, touching skins and skulls and seeing a turkey fan for the first time.” She continued, “Plus, it’s TEKS-aligned and free. What’s not to love?”

A Q&A WITH LIBBY SIBERT

In the world of educational resources, what makes the Conservation Legacy programs stand out?

LS: “First, the programs are accessible and affordable. We don’t have to beg someone to come to our school; we don’t have to write grants or pay mileage.

Second, in the case of the Discovery Trunks, the materials are complete and in good shape. Sometimes, I marvel that they’re willing to share them.

The curriculum is great because it can stand alone, or teachers can add as much to it as they want. The lessons are great fun, but they’re not fluff. They’re academically challenging.

Third, the L.A.N.D.S. Educators bring their passion and knowledge to bear every time. The kids are spellbound by the things they learn, and I’m amazed by the details they retain. They go home, and tell their parents. Some of them get so excited, they convince their parents to take them to the state parks or places where they can get outside.

Finally, the lessons are all hands-on, which makes them inclusive. Every child, regardless of their academic standing, can touch, see and imagine, so no one gets left out.

I hope the funding for these programs continues forever because they’re effective—and important.”

How has including Conservation Legacy programming in your classroom impacted your students?

LS: “As first graders, my students don’t have a lot of control over anything, but these Conservation Legacy programs empower them. They start looking at the world differently. After our last session, my students puffed up like proud peacocks and said, ‘I am a land steward’—and as such they undertook to keep the playground clean for the animals. It’s amazing to see six and seven-year-olds connecting to the land.”

From your perspective, why is it important that children are introduced to the natural world?

LS: “One of the best ways that young naturalists can learn about biomes and animals is to be a part of them. Biomes have purpose and functions. Animals have names, defenses and disguises. They communicate and have families. All animals, including humans, need food, water, clean air and shelter. By understanding animals, their needs and habitats, perhaps we can better understand ourselves, our needs and how we are a part of our vast, wonderful world.

Today, it’s more difficult to make that connection because technology gets in the way, but in Texas, wildlife is part of our tradition. If my students can be part of the world, instead of being afraid of it, then it’s a gift to them—and to our future.”

How does it make you feel to help open the doors to the outdoors for them?

LS: “It seems like the world is a rougher, scarier place today; but in the outdoors, there is peace and comfort for our souls. If I can make one child feel safe, brave and part of the natural world, then there’s hope. There’s always hope.”

The Conservation Legacy Effect

Featuring Elizabeth “Libby” Sibert

Article by LORIE A. WOODWARD

Photo courtesy of CONSERVATION LEGACY